

PLUCK AND LUCK

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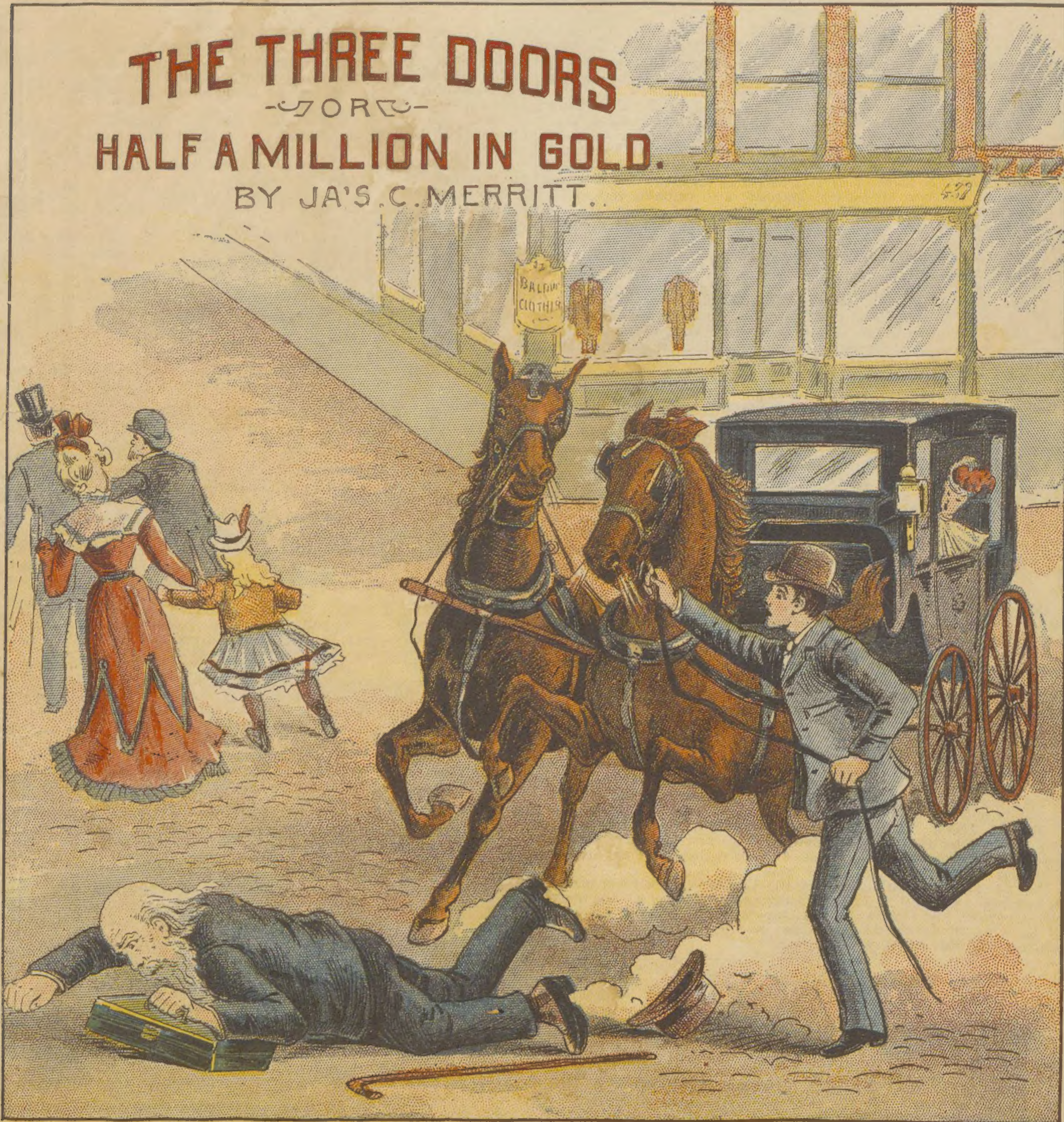
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THE THREE DOORS —WORLD— HALF A MILLION IN GOLD. BY JAS. C. MERRITT.



It was a critical moment; but the danger which threatened both the fair occupant of the carriage and the old man was suddenly averted by the bold action of a youth who, darting from the sidewalk, seized one of the horses by the head and checked their speed.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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THE THREE DOORS

OR,

HALF A MILLION IN GOLD.

BY JAS. C. MERRITT.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD COIN-DEALER.

"Stop them, somebody! Stop them! Stop them! Help! Help, help!"

It was a runaway team on Broadway, in the city of New York.

An elegant private coupe, drawn by a span of high-mettled bays with gold-mounted harness, came tearing up the crowded street like mad.

The coupe was without a driver, and as it swayed from side to side, crashing and banging among the carts, drays, hacks and other vehicles which pressed about it, the head and shoulders of a young and beautiful girl could be distinctly seen in the fading twilight, thrust from the window, with face as white as death itself, calling aloud for help.

The horses had reached the corner of Reade street, when, seized by some sudden freak, they turned abruptly out of the roadway and dashed into the latter thoroughfare, at the precise time that an old man, half blind and carrying a tin box in one hand, guiding himself by the aid of a cane held in the other, had attempted to cross the street.

It was a critical moment.

A crowd of men and boys were in full chase, shouting at the top of their voices and adding thereby to the horses' fright, while others could be seen hastening down the street with the evident intention of heading off the flying team.

Danger for the fair occupant of the carriage there was certainly, but the danger of the old man was greater.

But the danger which threatened both was suddenly averted by the bold action of a youth who, darting from the sidewalk, seized the off horse by the head and checked his speed.

He was not a moment too soon.

Already the old man had in his fright slipped on the slushy pavement and fallen. In another instant he would have beenampled beneath the horses' feet.

It was all the work of an instant.

In another the young man had relinquished his hold on the panting horses to a policeman who had come running up, and taking the aged stranger tenderly by the arm, assisted him to rise. Then drawing him to the sidewalk, he had, before the lady in the carriage had even time to thank him, mingled with the crowd.

Who was he?"

Where was he?

These questions were passed from mouth to mouth, but so suddenly had the whole thing happened that no one seemed able to tell.

The coachman, who had temporarily left his horses, now came running up and assumed their charge.

In another moment the coupe rolled away, the crowd dispersed, and the trifling incident—for such a happening is nothing more in New York City—became a thing of the past.

Now, had any one been especially anxious to have found the brave youth who had stopped the carriage, they need not have gone far.

Even as the bystanders looked about to discover what had become of him he was leading the old man up Reade street in the direction of Centre, seemingly oblivious to the fact that he had done anything out of the ordinary way.

They were an odd-looking couple.

One old, half blind and tottering on the brink of the grave; the other young and handsome, with dark-brown hair and flashing gray eyes, just entering upon the battle of life.

Right here the difference ended.

Socially their positions seemed much the same, for both were poorly clad—the younger man being by far the shabbier of the two—both belonged evidently to that great mass of the citizens of the metropolis who live in one perpetual struggle for the bare necessities of life.

The youth supported the steps of the old man with all the tenderness of a son.

"Are you hurt, sir?" he asked, as they left the crowd behind them. "That was a bad fall you had."

"Hurt, boy! hurt!" cried the old man in a tremulous voice. "I—I would have been killed had it not been for you. I ought to be very thankful, and I am. May I ask your name?"

"My name is Harry Ashmore."

"Where do you live? I shan't forget what you have done. I—I am very poor, but I have my little savings, and I shall reward you later on."

The boy laughed.

"I guess we are both of us in about the same fix," he said, lightly. "The fact is, I'm a stranger in the city, and I don't live anywhere in particular. If you could spare me half a dollar now to get a meal and a lodging—mind, I do not ask it—we will call it square."

They had reached the corner of Reade and Centre streets now. Six o'clock had already sounded on the numerous whistles of the manufacturing establishments in that crowded portion of the city, and the sidewalks were thronged with pedestrians, all hurrying toward their respective homes.

Certainly the poorest dressed among these busy toilers was better clad than the old man with the tin box, and yet the garments which he wore were princely when compared with those of the youth who now made this modest demand.

The old man, pausing in his walk, leaned against an adjoining railing and surveyed his companion from head to foot.

"Indeed! And is it so bad as that?" he demanded. "Now I come to look at you——"

"I look like a beggar, do I? Well, I ain't, and you needn't put me down for one. If you think I have earned half a dollar, give it to me. If not, I'll bid you good night and be off."

"Don't be hasty, young man. I didn't say you looked like a beggar."

"But you meant it. I'm poor enough, Heaven knows, and, to the best of my knowledge, have not a friend or a relative in the world, but I haven't fallen as low as that—not quite—yet."

The old man eyed him strangely.

"You are not acquainted in New York?" he asked at length.

"No."

"Where are you from?"

"I came here from Chicago three months ago."

"Why did you come?"

"Because I was a fool."

"You hoped to get employment?"

"Yes, that was my idea."

"And you have failed?"

"Failed miserably. I have tried everything. I have gone from door to door through the business part of the city, only to meet with refusal from every one to whom I applied."

"Hum!"

The old man seemed lost in thought.

Several minutes elapsed before he spoke again.

"How old are you?" he demanded, abruptly, raising his eyes to Harry Ashmore, who stood quietly by waiting for him to speak.

"Twenty-two last August."

"Just his age—just his age," murmured the other to himself, "and as to looks——"

"Who were your parents, young man?"

This last sentence was spoken with a certain fierceness.

The old man had thrust his head suddenly forward, and was now peering into Harry's face.

"Don't ask me," returned the youth, drawing back. "I couldn't tell you if I would. I was brought up by a man named Reynolds in Chicago. I was not his son, as he often told me; who I am I know no more than yourself."

The old man's countenance fell.

"Where is this Reynolds?" he asked, in a faltering voice.

"He is dead. He was a carpenter, and fell off a building and was killed."

"But he left a family—they may know?"

"He left no one. He was unmarried; we lived alone together from the date of my earliest recollection until his death."

"After he died you came to New York?"

"That was it. I had nothing to live on, had never been taught any trade nor put to business, and I thought I might as well starve to death in one place as another—certainly I hit it when I came here."

"Is it so bad as that?"

"I have eaten nothing since yesterday morning."

"And you want work?"

"The worst kind of way."

Again the strange look in the old man's eyes.

"How would you like to work for me?" he asked. "I am not rich, but I will pay you well, give you plenty to eat and a place to sleep."

Harry Ashmore broke into a hearty laugh.

"What, selling old coins?" he exclaimed. "From your appearance I shouldn't think there was enough in that business for one, to say nothing of two."

"Ha! you know me?"

"I don't know your name, but I have seen you standing beside your little boards with old coins tacked upon them on the Vesey street side of St. Paul's churchyard fence. I have often wondered how you managed to keep soul and body together."

"You have?"

"Yes, many a time. I recognized you the moment you stumbled under the horses' feet."

The old man gave vent to a low chuckle.

"People don't know as much as they think they do, sometimes," he muttered. "The day may come when old Peter Stanton will surprise them all."

"Shouldn't wonder," replied the other, lightly. "But I must be off, my friend, for I have my night's lodging to look up yet. You can keep your half dollar—I don't want it. I guess you need it more than I do, after all."

He had turned, and was about to hurry away, when the old man's grasp was felt on his arm.

"Stop! I want you," he whispered. "I have work for a young head and stout limbs which I am getting too old and too feeble to perform myself. Come with me to my house and I will explain. Meanwhile, oblige me by accepting this as a reward for the service you have done me to-night."

He pressed a coin into the hand of Harry Ashmore as he spoke, who held it carelessly up to the light of a lamp-post beneath which they stood.

The coin was no half-dollar, as Harry had supposed.

Instead, he beheld a new twenty-dollar piece of bright, yellow gold.

CHAPTER II.

JOE DOUBLEDAY RECEIVES A STARTLING PROPOSAL.

"HERE you are, gents! here you are! a little article-required in every family. Slocum's patent needle-threader and thimble combined—something that no well-regulated household should be without. It threads the finest needle with the coarsest cotton without the aid of glasses, and, one might almost say, without the aid of eyes. A child can operate it; an old lady of ninety, who is stone-blind, has been known to use it freely, for it is the best, the simplest, the most useful little article ever offered to the public for the small sum of ten cents."

It was Joe Doubleday who rattled off this long harangue, and having reached a point where it was absolutely necessary for him to pause for breath, he stopped and began putting a piece of thread through one of Slocum's patent needle-threaders and pulling it out again with great celerity in a vain hope of attracting a crowd.

Now Joe Doubleday lived on crowds.

They had become to him as essential as the very air he breathed.

Picture to yourself a young fellow of trim, well-built appearance, dressed—it was the month of March—in a seedy suit of gray cassimere of last summer's pattern, without overcoat or gloves, wearing low shoes all run down at the heel and out at the toe, and a rusty beaver—several hats behind the fashion—tilted rakishly on one side of his head.

Add to the picture a little black bag slung across his back by aid of a strap, and one of Slocum's patent needle-threaders, which he is in the act of operating, with hands fairly blue from the chilling March air, and you have as accurate a representation of Joe Doubleday, the street fakir, as pen can give.

Not that there was anything especially peculiar about Joe Doubleday.

By no means.

There were hundreds of men just like him in New York City at the time of which we write—there are hundreds still to-day.

Drifting in from the country some ten years previous to the opening of our story, provided with about ten dollars in cash, unlimited cheek, a love for good whisky and a sportive life, without the least desire whatever to work in order to obtain these luxuries, Joe had led a precarious existence for more years than he liked to count.

He had been a clerk, a salesman, a bartender, a billiard-marker, a book agent, an attendant in a gambling saloon, a— But where's the use in further enumeration? In each and every position which he had occupied Joe had been found faithless, through an overweening love of strong drink and an unfortunate propensity to appropriate to his own use any surplus cash on which he could get his hands.

And now, all else failing, he had been forced to the street to eke out a living as best he could, for the simple reason that no one could be found to trust him at all.

"A poor night for business," he muttered, as he stood on the corner of Chatham street and Chambers, watching the endless procession that hurried past him. "Seems as though no one had any time to spare to-night. By ginger! I wish I knew what would attract them. If I was only musical, now, I might try a song."

But Joe was not musical, and even if he had been, it is more than doubtful if a song would have proved an attraction to a New York crowd on that damp, chilling March evening—the evening upon which young Harry Ashmore drew the old coin-dealer from under the horses' feet.

He therefore began his usual harangue once more with an energy which betokened an empty stomach, and—we blush to say it, but truth compels us—a throat dry and parched for the want of a drink.

"Here you are, gents! The best, the cheapest little article that was ever offered to the public——"

Joe Doubleday stopped suddenly, and, thrusting his needle-threader into his pocket, began to move away from in front of the saloon before which his station had been chosen.

The reason for this sudden action was to be found in a stout, comfortably-dressed middle-aged gentleman, with eyes concealed by a pair of green spectacles, who had paused at the curbstone and stood regarding him fixedly as he began to talk.

"Another one of those blasted detectives!" muttered the young man to himself. "He knows I've got no license, and he's after me. That's the way with those fellows. They won't give a man a chance to make an honest living, and they are ready to nab him the instant he attempts to go wrong."

He turned the corner of Chambers street, and was hurrying away, when a hand was suddenly laid upon his arm.

"How's business, Mr. Doubleday? Rather slow, I fancy, is it not?"

It was the man with the green spectacles.

With a few quick steps he had hurried to the fakir's side.

"Business is all right if a fellow can only be let alone," replied Joe, crossly, at the same time backing up against a wall.

They had followed him up so closely that they even knew his name.

"Sold much to-day?"

"Sold what? I ain't selling nothing."

"Slocum's patent needle-threader."

"Oh, you go to grass! Mind your own business and I'll mind mine."

The man laughed.

"I fear you don't understand me, my friend," he said quietly. "I have not the slightest disposition to interfere with your business. I simply want a young man of about your size and mental capacity for a delicate job. You have been named to me as a suitable person—there's my card."

The card was a plain bit of pasteboard, on which was imprinted the words:

"HAMMEL & Co.,

"99 1-2 Chambers Street.

"Reliable Servants Furnished."

That was all.

Joe Doubleday stared at the man doubtfully.

He had heard of Hammel & Co. before.

Their office, in fact, was a dingy, triangular building, at the time of which we write, occupying the space at the intersection of Chambers, New Chambers and Oak streets, diagonally opposite to where he now stood.

Their business was that of an intelligence office, and to the mind of the wily street fakir, thoroughly familiar with all the ins and outs of city ways, it had always been a mystery how such a business could flourish in that locality, one of the most degraded New York can produce.

"What kind of a job do you want me for?" he asked, in a tone that seemed to imply that the compensation would have to be exceedingly liberal to meet with any consideration on his part.

"That's something I will explain later," said he of the green spectacles. "Do you see that carriage in front of our office door over there?"

"Yes, I see it."

"If you will consent to take a ride up-town with me I'll explain what I want of you in a very few words."

"Are you Mr. Hammel?"

"That's my name."

"Then why not explain now?"

"I prefer to explain in my own way. Understand me, Mr. Doubleday, this is no trifling matter. If you consent to place yourself in my hands, and follow my directions implicitly, I guarantee that you shall be master of half a million of dollars in less than three months' time."

"Half—a—million—of—dollars!"

The street fakir leaned heavily against the wall and caught his breath.

"I—I don't think I understand you!" he murmured. "Surely you have made a mistake?"

"I've made no mistake whatever. I know you and all about you. I know that you were kicked out of Basset & Fuller's for keeping money which did not belong to you, that you had to leave Jones & Blixen's, Nooney & Warren's and half a dozen other places which I could name for precisely the same cause. Beside this, I understand what I have just said to you perfectly. I repeat that if you will place yourself in my hands and be governed by me entirely, I will make you independently rich in less than three months' time."

Joe Doubleday stared at the speaker in dumb amazement.

There could be no doubt that he understood whom he was talking to—not the least in the world.

But to be stopped in the street by an utter stranger and addressed with such a proposition seemed so strange, so utterly incomprehensible.

He felt that it was impossible for him to understand it—no use to try.

"What do *you* expect to make out of all this?" he stammered. "You are not working for nothing, I suppose?"

Mr. Hammel laughed.

"Oh, dear me, not at all," he replied. "We shall expect you to be liberal, Mr. Doubleday, when you come into your fortune. We shall expect our little commission, you may depend. Do you feel like looking into the matter further? If you do, you

have only to enter that carriage with me and all shall be explained. When you understand the nature of my proposition fully you can accept or reject it, just as you please."

For a few moments Joe Doubleday hesitated.

Let the business be what it might, he thought, matters with him could not be much worse than they were just at the present time.

"I'll go," he said, at length; "but mind, I'll listen to nothing crooked—nothing that will lay me liable to the law."

They entered the carriage together.

When they alighted—and it was half an hour later—they found themselves opposite one of the princely mansions in Fifth avenue, opposite Central Park.

Whispering to the driver to keep his horses moving, the man with the green spectacles turned to Joe Doubleday, who stood shivering on the pavement by his side.

During the entire ride scarce a word had been spoken.

Whatever might be the revelations of Mr. Hammel, it was evident that he intended to disclose them at his own good pleasure, and not before.

"Do you see that house?" he whispered, pointing up at the brilliantly-lighted windows beneath which they stood.

"I see it," replied Joe, nervously. "What then?"

"Do you know to whom it belongs?"

"No."

"I will tell you. It is the home of Mr. Alfred Van Cortland."

Joe Doubleday started.

His companion had mentioned the name of one of the richest men in New York, known to every one as many times a millionaire.

"Look again," whispered Mr. Hammel, suddenly. "What else do you see?"

"I see a particularly beautiful girl moving across the parlor just at this present moment."

"That is what I refer to," continued the keeper of the intelligence office. "Look at her well, Joe Doubleday. There—do you see? She approaches the window now. Now she is about to leave the room—now she is gone."

"Great Jehosaphat, how lovely!" murmured Joe as the vision disappeared.

"Do you think so?" whispered Mr. Hammel, drawing him away from the window. "Then the work which I want you for will be all the more agreeable. If you will place yourself in my hands I swear to you that inside of the time named you shall marry Grace Van Cortland and have half a million dollars in your own right."

CHAPTER III.

HARRY ASHMORE'S DREAM.

HARRY ASHMORE gazed upon the shining gold piece received from the old coin-dealer with no little surprise.

"Haven't you made a mistake?" he asked, extending the coin toward the old man. "Surely you never intended to give me any such sum as this?"

the man gave another of his strange chuckles.

"Oh! it's all right," he replied. "Old Pete Stanton can be liberal when he chooses, if people do call him a miser. My life is worth more than twenty dollars to me."

Then, with a sudden air of alarm, he added:

"Don't you even tell that I gave it to you, boy. I'm going to take you home with me; I live in rather a poor neighborhood, and it will never do for those about me to suspect that I am other than what I really am—very, very poor. Come, will you accompany me? To-night you can eat and sleep. It will be time enough to discuss the work I mentioned, wanting you for when to-morrow comes."

Harry dropped the gold piece into his pocket somewhat doubtfully.

For the first time in his life he felt that he had been the recipient of charity, and somehow the feeling did not please him at all.

The closer he looked at the feeble old man before him, with his dull, watery eyes, his withered face and long white hair, which hung about his neck and shoulders, the more convinced he became that his mind must be affected, and that his talk of being able to employ him in any profitable undertaking was nothing more than unmeaning babble, born of a disordered brain.

Should he accompany him to his home?

Should he, for lack of something better to do, follow this somewhat singular adventure out to the end?

At first his pride revolted at the thought of being in any way beholden to an utter stranger—and surely the condition of the old coin-collector, if one might judge from his personal appearance, could be but little better than his own.

Nor did Harry have the slightest cause to change this opinion when, yielding at length, he followed the old man to his home.

The house which they entered was a low, rickety frame structure, two stories in height, jammed in between two tall tenements which towered above it, on Mulberry street between Hester and Grand, positively one of the worst localities in all New York.

In the basement was a foul-smelling rag and bottle establishment; on the first story, to judge from the red and white striped pole which was thrust outward into the street, and the name Guiseppe Donatello in green letters upon a yellow ground above the door, an Italian barber plied his humble trade.

It was to the second story that the old coin-dealer conducted Harry Ashmore.

Here, opening the door with a great iron key big enough to have fitted the lock of a jail, he ushered him into a room as bare and poverty-stricken, to all appearances, as anything he had ever seen.

The floor was carpetless and not over clean; a cheap cot-bed occupied one corner, a bureau tilted forward on three legs another, while a pine table, two chairs and a small stove completed the furnishing of the room.

We say *furnishing*, because the three great wooden chests which stood against the walls can hardly be termed furniture.

They were made of solid oak, bound around with brass, and seemed very much out of place in an apartment of this sort.

Placing his tin box—which he informed Harry was filled with

ancient coins—upon the top of one of these chests, the old man motioned to him to be seated with an air of great politeness, and lighting a cheap glass lamp, proceeded to secure the door by the aid of series of bolts and bars.

"Bad folks about here," he muttered. "They know about my old coins, and might get the notion they were money—d'ye see?"

Harry did not see.

And the more he talked with his strange host the more bewildered and perplexed he became.

At one moment he would complain bitterly of his poverty, at another he would hint that some day people would find out that he was not as poor as he seemed.

In one breath he would mutter that he was only a poor old man almost ready for the grave, in the next he would rattle away about his travels in India, Egypt, China and other countries, as though he had been a millionaire all his life, with nothing to do but travel about for pleasure in whichever direction fancy bade him direct his steps.

The meal which was placed before Harry Ashmore was frugal in the extreme.

A loaf of bread, a pot of tea, a little oatmeal and nothing more.

It was served on chipped and broken crockery, on a table without a cloth.

And yet the boy enjoyed it.

The old man had started a fire in the stove, which made the room warm and comfortable.

To Harry, who for days had done nothing but tramp the streets in vain search for employment never found, the humble room seemed a veritable haven of rest.

Then the conversation of the coin-dealer was most entertaining.

He had traveled much, he had read much; and, what was more, he remembered what he had seen and read.

And when, something after ten o'clock, Harry was shown to an attic, which was reached by means of a ladder and a half door in the ceiling, he stretched himself out upon a rough straw mattress on the floor, drew over his tired frame an old horse blanket with which Mr. Stanton had provided him, and with the first feelings of positive rest that he had known in weeks sunk into a dreamless sleep.

What is it in man's nature that even in sleep sometimes conveys to his mind an innate consciousness of events which are transpiring about him?

Harry Ashmore was no student in mental philosophy—if any one had asked him this question he could not have told.

And yet, as he lay there, his senses locked in slumber, there seemed to creep over him after a time a certain consciousness that all was not right in the room below.

He seemed to both see and hear persons moving about on tip-toe; men with black masks on their faces and great bags in their hands, which they were in the act of filling with shining gold pieces from the old coin-dealer's wooden chests.

It was a dream, of course, and yet it seemed so real.

It was nothing but the purest imagination, and yet there were the men, the bags, the old coin-dealer stretched upon the bed, and, above all, there was the gold.

It seemed as though the chests were filled with glittering coins similar to the one the old man had given him—an inexhaustible supply.

It seemed——

Hark!

What sound was that?

It is a dream no longer, but a human voice which rings out below in one deep, soul-stirring cry:

"My gold! my gold! They've stolen my gold!"

He had actually heard it—there was no doubt of that.

Broad awake now, Harry Ashmore sat bolt upright upon the mattress in his attic and stared about him.

He was surrounded by total darkness.

All was as silent as the grave.

He listened.

The cry was not repeated.

Was it after all but a fragment of his dream?

Lighting a candle, which the old man had given him upon retiring, Harry, who had not removed his clothes, advanced to the trap-door and raised it.

The room below was in darkness.

As he strained his ear at the open trap-door sounds of faint groaning could be heard.

"There's something wrong down there," he murmured, and dropping upon the ladder, which was still in position, he descended several rounds.

Turning and holding the candle-stick downward in such a manner that a feeble light shone upon objects beneath him, a strange sight met his gaze.

The three chests were open, the coin-dealer, with his white hair all streaming, lay face downward upon the floor, where, here and there, were scattered little piles of shining gold pieces, one of which—and it was the largest—the old man seemed to be trying to clutch with nerveless hand.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE OF THE THREE DOORS.

It was a house with three doors.

Not that there is in itself anything so strange in this, for most houses have a great many more than three doors.

In this instance we refer to three doors opening from the street.

Originally—away back in revolutionary times—the old house had been occupied by one family alone, and although now divided into three distinct business establishments, it was, through the change in the street lines, actually smaller than in days of yore.

At the time of which we write—it has long ago been removed—the house with three doors occupied the triangular space bounded by Chambers, New Chambers and Oak streets, in the city of New York.

From each of these streets opened a door connecting with one of the three divisions of the old mansion.

The first door was off the New Chambers street side, and

connected with the offices of Mr. Christopher Watson, respectable money-changer, who, for the benefit of the numerous tradesmen in his immediate neighborhood, also did a banking business in a small way.

The second door was on the Chambers street side, and afforded entrance to the intelligence office of Hammel & Co., one of the best known establishments of its kind in the city.

The third door opened upon Oak street, as narrow though not quite as dirty then as now.

Above its dingy fan-light was painted in dark blue letters:

SIMON DURAND & Co.,
Private Detective Agency.

It would seem that the three firms of Christopher Watson, Hammel & Co., and Simon Durand & Co. ought to be pretty good friends from the fact of their being near neighbors to a pre-eminent degree.

Yet it had been frequently remarked in the neighborhood, and by the clerks of the firms themselves, that the three proprietors had not only never been seen to speak to one another, but never even to meet.

Mr. Watson, if he desired the services of a detective to look up the affairs of a delinquent debtor, certainly never had been known to apply to Mr. Durand, nor for a servant to his neighbor Hammel.

Mr. Durand showed an equal indisposition to patronize either Hammel & Co. or Mr. Watson; and as for the keeper of the intelligence office, if he ever stood in need of the services of either a detective or a money-changer, he had never called upon either of his neighbors to help him out.

And yet only their partitions divided the three offices, originally only so many rooms in the old house.

Upon a certain mild afternoon in the latter part of February, a week or two previous to the adventure of the street fakir, Joe Doubleday, with the senior partner of the firm of Hammel & Co., an elegant private equipage, with liveried coachman on the box and footman behind, rolled up to the Oak street door of the old house, and a richly-dressed old gentleman alighting, entered the detective office of Durand & Co.

Walking slowly up to the iron railing which divided the apartment, he presented his card to a clerk who sat writing at a desk.

The card bore the name of Alfred Van Cortland, one of the richest of New York's millionaires.

"I desire to see Mr. Durand," he said, with a stately bow. "Be good enough, if you please, to inform him that I am here."

The clerk, with one quick glance at the card, immediately retreated within an inner office.

"Mr. Durand will see you now, sir," he said, presently returning. "Be good enough to walk inside."

Following the clerk, Mr. Van Cortland was ushered into the presence of an elderly gentleman, with heavy black beard and piercing black eyes, who sat behind a handsome desk.

"Close the door, Clark," he said, raising his eyes slightly toward his visitor, "and let no one disturb me. Mr. Van Cortland, be seated, if you please."

In another moment the millionaire and the head of the private detective firm were alone.

"Well, sir," said the former, after a moment's pause, "I am here in answer to your letter of yesterday. What do you wish?"

For an instant Mr. Durand suffered his gaze to rest searchingly upon the face of his visitor, then opening a large book upon the desk, he pretended to read.

"I wrote you yesterday, Mr. Van Cortland," he said, slowly, "that it was my desire to make to you a communication of importance if you would call on me to-day."

"You did, sir. And as I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, never even heard of you before, the letter struck me as being a trifle strange."

"It is a part of my business to surprise people, sir."

"So it would seem."

"I propose to surprise you."

"Indeed!"

Mr. Van Cortland raised his eyebrows superciliously.

It was nevertheless observable that he was decidedly ill at ease.

If the head of the firm of Durand & Co. observed this, he displayed no sign.

"You are a rich man, Mr. Van Cortland," he remarked, in a casual way.

"And pray what is that to you, sir? Proceed to business, if you please."

"This is business. I wish to ask you what you are worth?"

"Sir!"

"I repeat the question. I wish to know how much money you are worth?"

"I did not come here to be insulted, sir," cried the millionaire, rising indignantly. "I have no answer for your impudent question. I bid you good-day."

"Sit down," said the other, coolly. "Perhaps you will be less reluctant to answer my question when I inform you that your entire fortune has been amassed through fraud. Stop! don't exclaim! Sit down, I say, and listen to me."

With a face of deathly whiteness the millionaire had sunk into a chair.

"I don't understand," he breathed faintly. "Perhaps you will be good enough to explain."

"Certainly, my dear sir—certainly; and let me state right here that you have nothing whatever to fear providing you act as I direct. Be good enough to pay attention while I read from this book."

As he spoke Mr. Durand again opened the large book on the desk before him and began to read aloud:

"On January 2, 18—, there died in the city of Boston one Joshua Minford, leaving a fortune amounting to some \$200,000 to be equally divided between his sons, Alfred and Henry. At the time of their father's death both these young men were unmarried, and the provisions of the will were duly carried out.

"Five years elapsed. Alfred Minford, through dissipation and riotous living, had squandered every penny of his fortune. Henry, on the other hand, had preserved his carefully, and it had become considerably increased.

"As the two brothers had but little in common, the loss of the fortune of Alfred Minford was unknown to Henry, and I

find that at the date named the younger brother, having been left a widower with one child, a son, suddenly returned from England, left that son in his brother's charge, executing a will leaving his entire estate to the boy, to become the property of his brother Alfred in the event of the child's decease, and naming his brother trustee.

"Then Henry Minford, in the endeavor to assuage his grief at the death of his wife, started to travel in Egypt and the far East, from which travels he never returned.

"Alfred Minford had not yet married, and about this time I find that he converted his brother's possessions into cash, and with his little nephew suddenly disappeared.

"It was supposed that they both perished in a Western steamboat explosion, but the facts in the case never were known. As nothing was ever heard of Henry Minford, no special inquiry was made. The two brothers, the nephew and the fortune had alike disappeared, and their very existence was soon forgotten by all save a few."

Mr. Durand closed the great book and leaned back in his chair.

Before him sat Mr. Van Cortland, white and rigid.

His lips had parted slightly. A wild, staring look was in his eyes.

"Interesting little story, that, ain't it?" said Mr. Durand.

For an instant there was no response.

Then, leaning forward, the millionaire gave utterance to three words:

"Are they alive?"

"The son lives. I believe the father to be dead."

The man seemed to breathe more freely.

"How did you learn all this?" he asked in a low, constrained voice.

"It does not matter. It is the business of my firm to acquire secrets. Will you answer my question now, and tell me how much you are worth?"

"Between eight and ten millions. I can't tell the exact sum."

"I suppose you had rather sacrifice a portion of this than have me lay the true history of Alfred Minford before the world?"

"What can you prove? What do you want?" demanded the millionaire, now trembling in every limb.

Mr. Durand fixed his eyes upon the face of the rich man sternly.

"I can prove that you are Alfred Minford," he said, in a low voice. "I can prove that you abandoned your brother's son and appropriated his fortune to yourself. Then you came to New York, embarked in business, and under the name of Van Cortland increased that fortune a thousand fold. Don't misunderstand me, sir. I can produce the strongest proof of every word I say. The young man, Henry Minford, still lives. I can produce him at short notice. My demand is justice, Mr. Van Cortland, entire justice at your hands."

"Put your demand in definite shape."

"Very well, then. I wish you to sign this document. It is your note of hand promising to pay to Henry Minford one million dollars upon the production of proof of his identity. That is the first step. For the present I ask no more. In a short time this young man will arrive from England. I shall take

you to him, and produce my proof. Providing it is satisfactory to you, the note must be paid, and you are then to execute a will devising your entire estate jointly to Henry Minford and your daughter Helen, with an expressed wish that they marry—that is all."

"And if I refuse to sign?"

"Then it will become my duty to present the original of this document to the proper authorities."

Mr. Durand placed a folded paper in the hands of the millionaire.

Trembling from head to foot, Mr. Van Cortland drew forth a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses and examined the document silently.

The small black eyes of the private detective regarded him stealthily.

"Will you sign?" he asked at length, in a hard, unyielding tone.

"Is there no alternative? Suppose I were to make you an offer?"

"Couldn't listen to it. Will you sign?"

"Suppose——"

"One moment, Mr. Van Cortland. I have no time for trifling. Here is the paper, there is the pen. For the last time I ask you to sign."

There was the sound of carriage wheels to be heard outside the Oak street door of the old house on the triangle a few moments later.

The rich Mr. Van Cortland had taken his departure, leaving the head of the firm of Durand & Co. holding in his hand, with the signature still wet, his note for one million.

"It is the first step," he muttered triumphantly. "The first step, and it worked like a charm. Let me but accomplish the next as well, and the key to a literal mine of gold is in my hands to use whenever I please."

CHAPTER V.

THE BLUE HEART.

"BACK to the carriage," whispered Mr. Hammel to Joe Doubleday, as the figure of the young lady disappeared from their view behind the curtained windows of the Van Cortland mansion. "We have accomplished our work here for the present. Now I'm willing to talk."

Drawing the astonished fakir in the direction of the carriage, which was now slowly approaching them, Mr. Hammel, with a sign to the driver to halt, bade him enter, and in another moment they were rattling off down-town.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Doubleday?" asked the keeper of the intelligence office when they were once more out of sight of the house.

"I don't know what to think of it."

"But you are not displeased with the prospect?"

"Of marrying that beautiful girl? By no means! Not at all!"

"Then you are willing to enter into this bargain with me?"

"Let me understand you fully," answered Joe, excitedly, "and then you shall have my reply."

"There is nothing to understand. You are simply to agree to do precisely as I tell you—that is all."

"And I am to have half a million and marry the girl?"

"Yes."

"Girl worth any money?"

"She is Mr. Van Cortland's daughter and his only heir."

"All right. I'm with you."

"You promise?"

"You bet! Fire away—tell me what I've got to do."

"Swear first that you will never reveal what has happened this night to a living soul. That you will never allude to the firm of Hammel & Co. in this connection at all."

"I swear! Bring on all the Bibles you like—it's the same to me."

"Never mind the Bibles, but remember this: You are as good as a dead man if you violate your oath."

"Never fear, boss," replied Joe, lightly. "I've sold myself to the devil now, so fire away and tell me what I'm to do."

"Thank you for the compliment, Mr. Doubleday," replied the keeper of the intelligence office, grimly. "There's nothing like understanding the true character of one's friends. Now listen to me."

"I'm listening."

"From this moment your name is Henry Mudge."

"Henry Mudge—Henry Mudge," repeated Joe. "I'll say it over a dozen times so that I won't forget it, d'ye see?"

"Make less talk, young man," interposed Mr. Hammel, sternly. "I say your name, so far as you have ever known it, is Henry Mudge. Your early life was spent in the streets of St. Louis. You have no recollection of your parents, nor of any one relating to you, except a man with one eye, whose name was Caleb Crutchett—do you think you can remember that?"

"Oh, yes! Mudge—Crutchett—Crutchett—Mudge—I'll remember," said Joe.

"You had best see that you do, for the consequences will be unpleasant if you should happen to forget. To avoid that I have written out your instructions here in this paper. Take it and study it carefully after you get to your hotel."

"To my what?"

A vision of a ten-cent lodging-house in the Bowery which he sometimes favored with his presence was at that moment uppermost in Joe Doubleday's mind.

"I said your hotel, and I meant what I said. In the name of Henry Minford you'll find a room engaged for you at the Fifth Avenue, which you will occupy shortly."

"At the Fifth—Fifth Avenue! You take my breath away."

"Then get up a fresh supply by keeping your mouth shut. I'm sorry to see that you are disposed to talk so much, Mr. Doubleday. A long tongue is perhaps one of the most deadly foes we have to fear in this emergency. Oblige me by making no further comments until I am through."

"You will, as I have said, sleep to-night in the room taken in the name of Henry Minford at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. One week from to-day, precisely at twelve o'clock, you will be waited upon by two gentlemen."

THE THREE DOORS.

"One will be Mr. Durand, of the firm of Durand & Co., private detectives, in Oak street, the other Mr. Van Cortland himself.

"You will by that time have studied your part thoroughly from the written instructions I have given you, and will know how to act. Unless some mistake is made on your part, you will in a few days be placed in possession of one million of dollars, which——"

"Thought you said it was half a million?" interrupted Joe.

"I said that you would be the possessor of half a million, but you will receive a million. When it is safely secured to you, Hammel & Co. will expect to see you at their office, prepared to make over one half the sum to them."

"Phew! Rather a steep commission, ain't it?"

Mr. Hammel laughed.

"Well, you are a cheeky scoundrel," he said. "Here you are going to receive exactly the amount I promised you, and as yet, although you know absolutely nothing of the game you are to play, you are trying to cheat me out of my share in the spoils. But it won't do, young man, it won't do. Unless you abide entirely by my instructions you will never secure a cent of Mr. Van Cortland's millions nor win his daughter's hand."

"Hold on, colonel, I'm through," interposed Joe. "No more joking—it's business now right up to the nines."

"I'm glad to hear you say so. However I know you pretty well. I flatter myself, Mr. Doubleday, I haven't been watching you night and day for nothing during the last two weeks."

"You can do all the watching you please. Now about this business. Can't you tell me what I'm to do?"

"The written instructions will tell you, but seeing that you are somewhat impatient, I will let you begin work now. Be good enough to follow me, if you please."

We have not found space to report entire this conversation between Joe Doubleday and the mysterious Mr. Hammel.

By this time the carriage had reached a certain point in the Bowery, and as the keeper of the New Chambers street intelligence office uttered these last words it drew up beside the curb and came to a halt.

Mr. Hammel now led the way through a hall door opening at the side of a tailor's shop, and began the ascent of a dark flight of stairs.

Nor was this movement entirely lost on Joe Doubleday.

No one knew the Bowery better than himself, and he had not failed to observe the nature of the place which they had entered.

It was the abode of a man who had chosen a most singular method of earning a livelihood—namely, the painting of bruised eyes.

A sign above the hall entrance made known his calling.

This sign Joe had not failed to observe, and it only served to render the movements of his conductor more perplexing than they had been before.

He was, however, afforded no opportunity to demand an explanation, for, upon gaining the first floor above the street, Mr. Hammel tapped lightly upon a door.

It was immediately opened by an exceedingly dirty-looking individual, who wore a faded cashmere dressing-gown and was smoking a short clay pipe.

At the sight of his visitors a look of intelligence appeared on his face. Throwing the door wide open, he invited them in with a wave of his hand.

The room was shabby and ill-kept, more resembling the studio of some impecunious artist than anything else.

"So you've come, have you?" remarked the man, as he closed the door behind them. "I suppose you are ready for me to begin business at once?"

"In one moment," replied Hammel, and, taking Joe Doubleday by the arm, he drew him to one side.

"Do you see this?" he said, placing an old time-worn letter in the street fakir's hand.

The letter was so folded as to conceal the writing. Instead a small blue heart appeared painted at the bottom of the sheet.

"I see the blue heart, if that is what you mean."

"Precisely. Now, Mr. Doubleday, you will be good enough to remove your coat and underclothing, for I have brought you to this place for the express purpose of having a representation of that blue heart tattooed in India ink upon your breast."

CHAPTER VI.

A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY.

SPRINGING down the ladder which connected the chamber of the old coin-dealer with the loft above, Harry Ashmore gained the side of the prostrate man with a bound.

"Mr. Stanton! Mr. Stanton!" he shouted, at the same time trying to raise him. "Speak! For heaven's sake what is the matter here?"

There was no answer returned to his cries.

The old man, though unconscious, was breathing heavily, nor was there about his person, as Harry hastily examined it, any appearance of a wound.

What had happened?

The open window, the position of the body, the appearance of the chests and the gold pieces scattered about the floor, all served to tell the tale with startling plainness.

The matter was robbery.

The old coin-dealer, while pretending to be poor, was doubtless just the reverse, and the fact becoming known to his unprincipled neighbors, some one had gained entrance to his apartments and robbed him of his hoard.

Leaving the side of the man who had undertaken to befriend him, Harry sprang toward the open window and looked out upon the night.

The window, which was on the second story, commanded a view of the back yards of the houses on Mott street, and the rear of those facing Mott street beyond.

The moon, which had just risen, shed a certain light upon surrounding objects, which, though not really clear, were distinct, was still sufficient to show to Harry Ashmore the forms of three men, with large bags on their shoulders, in the act of clapping the rear fence.

It showed him, also, a ladder reaching from the window to the back yard, making the mode of entrance chosen by the burglars entirely plain.

Here was certainly a dilemma.

Should he leave the old coin-dealer where he was and seek to recover his stolen property, or should he content himself simply with raising an outcry, and return to render his aged host such assistance as he might stand in need of?

It was a matter for instant decision.

A low murmur from the lips of the coin-dealer caused Harry Ashmore to decide at once.

"My gold—my precious gold! Oh, save my gold!"

Save his gold!

Then it was more to him than life itself!

And Harry Ashmore, who was not of an ungrateful nature, sprang through the window, gained the ladder, and was over the back fence on the trail of the burglars just in time to see their vanishing forms pass through the hall door of one of the Mott street houses immediately in the rear.

If youth and pluck could do it, the old coin-dealer's gold should be saved.

Meanwhile the burglars, little dreaming that every movement on their part was closely watched, hurried through the lower hall of the Mott street tenement, the door of which—like the doors of all such buildings—was open night and day, and gaining the street, entered a close carriage which stood drawn up against the curb.

Here was a second dilemma.

Harry Ashmore had hoped to follow them through the street until a police officer should be encountered, for an attack upon three desperate men, unarmed as he was, could not be taken into question; now, as crouching in the shadow of the doorway, he witnessed this sudden move on their part, he realized how slight his chances really were.

It must have been after midnight, for there was no one stirring either way upon the block—no one in sight to whom the young man could appeal for help.

But he was not a nature to be daunted by trifles.

Gliding behind the carriage, Harry grasped the straps, and, swinging his feet into position upon the hind axle, was, almost before he had time to realize what he had done, whirled away thus suspended down Mott street at break-neck speed.

Had he captured the burglars or had the burglars captured him?

It was a question somewhat difficult to answer.

To let go his hold meant death, to call for help to some passer-by meant a pistol ball through the head from the rear window of the coach, perhaps—who could tell?

But no opportunity to call for help occurred.

So rapid was the progress of the carriage through the deserted streets, so great the noise caused by the rattling of the wheels over the rough pavement, that Harry could do nothing except hold on for dear life—it was all he could do to manage that.

The progress of the carriage was short.

Suddenly, and without preliminary warning, the driver reined in his horses before an old-fashioned looking building, and Harry, slipping from his dangerous perch, dropped into

the shadow of the wheels, determined that at least he would have the satisfaction of having tracked the burglars to their hiding-place, if nothing more.

He had done it already.

At the same instant the three men, alighting from the coach, carrying their bags, which appeared to be enormously heavy, upon their backs, entered the door of the old-fashioned building.

The coach meanwhile rattled away, reducing Harry to the necessity of taking refuge behind an ash-box which stood by the curb.

At the sound of the closing door he straightened himself up and surveyed the house.

It was a curious old affair, occupying a triangular position between three streets.

Above the door through which the burglars had disappeared was a sign bearing the legend:

CHRISTOPHER WATSON, *Exchange Office.*

"Good!" muttered Harry. "I'm all right now. I have them located, and the police——"

Heavens! What is this?

The boy had sunk bleeding to the pavement, uttering a single cry.

He has been shot—that is evident; and yet no report of pistol or gun has broken upon the midnight air.

Five minutes elapsed.

Harry Ashmore, to all appearance dead, lay stretched face downward upon the sidewalk, his hands flung out beyond his head.

Presently the door of Christopher Watson's money-changing office softly opened and a man crept out.

Advancing toward the body with many wary looks up and down the street, he tore aside the boy's shirt and placed his hand upon his heart.

"Dead!" he muttered. "The air-gun did the business—he's as dead as a door nail. It was a narrow escape! In another minute he would have brought the police down upon us—Great heavens! What is this?"

He was gazing upon the lateral breast of Harry Ashmore now with eyes dilating in unfeigned surprise.

There upon the breast a blue heart tattooed in India ink was faintly to be seen.

The man bent forward and examined it eagerly.

"It is—it is!" he murmured. "Even while I have been laboring to produce a counterfeit the genuine is thrust into my hands. What shall I do? There is no time to waste. First of all this body must be got in off the street."

He sprang toward the money-changer's door and hastily entered.

"Quick! Lend me a hand here!" he exclaimed to three men who stood within.

The men obeyed the summons instantly, and all four hurried into the street.

A surprise awaited them.

The body of Harry Ashmore had disappeared.

THE THREE DOORS.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW JOE DOUBLEDAY PROGRESSED.

JOE DOUBLEDAY spent that night at the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

He appeared there at about eleven o'clock, having been driven up to the entrance in a hack, and registering the name "Henry Minford, London," was received with the greatest respect.

"Very happy to see you, Mr. Minford," said the urbane clerk. "Your rooms were engaged some days ago by your friend, and you will find everything in readiness. Your trunks arrived this evening, and have already gone up to your room."

"Oh, indeed! Much obliged, I am suah," returned Joe, trying his best to assume an English accent. "As I am somewhat fatigued, be good enough to show me to my rooms at once."

Let not the reader suppose for an instant that it was in the shabby, out-at-the-elbows garb of the impecunious agent for Slocum's patent needle-threader that Joe Doubleday now appeared.

By no means.

He was clothed in an expensive, ill-fitting suit of tweeds of the true English cut, wore fine linen and jewelry, all bearing out the character he had assumed.

Of course all this was the provision of Mr. Hammel, and it is only due to Joe Doubleday to state that he filled the role of newly-arrived Englishman extremely well.

The next morning Joe was sick and kept his bed.

He had expected this.

Upon his breast was a painful reminder of last night's doings.

It was a small blue heart pricked with India ink into the skin.

The first thing that Joe Doubleday did upon awakening was to look at this, the next to count the contents of a well-stuffed pocketbook which he drew from the pillow beneath his head.

It contained some two hundred dollars in clean, new notes—more money than Joe had had in his possession for many a long day in the past.

The examination of his sealed instructions he resolved to postpone until after breakfast.

As his breast was exceedingly painful and much inflamed, he resolved to take this meal in bed.

It was during its progress that a surprise awaited him.

He had sent out for the morning papers, and in glancing over the list of arrivals by the Liverpool steamer the day before, was not a little astonished to see the name of Henry Minford among the rest.

Three great trunks stood in different parts of the room, and after breakfast Joe got up and examined them carefully.

They were covered with English express and hotel labels, and bore those of the steamer in which his arrival was quoted as well.

Upon being opened they were found to contain a complete and decidedly valuable outfit for a gentleman of exactly his build.

Whatever might be said of the firm of Hammel & Co. and their methods, in this matter they had certainly done their work well.

Joe Doubleday stayed at the Fifth Avenue Hotel for a week.

During this time his breast had healed, leaving the blue heart, which had, to all appearance, been tattooed upon it many years before.

He saw nothing whatever of Mr. Hammel, and although many times sorely tempted to do so, did not call at the Chambers street intelligence office.

That he carefully studied the written instructions, however, need not be said.

And during that week Joe Doubleday lived like a prince. What with rich wines, sumptuous meals and daily rides in the park, he began almost to wish that it might never come to an end.

The end came at last, however, and on the appointed day, precisely at twelve o'clock, a waiter presented himself at Joe's apartments, bearing two cards on a silver tray.

One bore the name of Alfred Van Cortland, the other was the business card of Durand & Co., the then well-known private detective firm.

"Show the gentlemen up," said Joe, nervously.

All his lightness of character seemed to have suddenly deserted him.

He paced the floor of the private parlor in a state of deep agitation.

Although he now thoroughly understood what was expected of him, he felt that he distrusted himself.

Would he be able to withstand the ordeal?

We shall see.

A light tap at the door announced the visitors.

"Come in!" shouted Joe, dropping into an arm-chair and catching up the morning paper in the attempt to appear as unconcerned as possible.

Two gentlemen entered the room.

The one was richly dressed, tall and stately, and evidently at an advanced age.

His companion was a stout, thick-set, elderly man, with gray hair, black beard and small, piercing black eyes.

Whether or no his face betrayed the agitation which he felt at that moment, Joe Doubleday never knew.

He arose to his feet instantly, and though to the best of his knowledge he had never seen the black-bearded man before, now grasped him warmly by the hand.

"Ah, good-morning, Mr. Durand; you are punctual, it seems. This, I presume, is Mr. Van Cortland, whom you told me yesterday I might expect."

A quick gleam of satisfaction shot from the small bead-like eyes.

Joe saw it, though Mr. Van Cortland, whose gaze was intently fixed upon the young man before him, did not.

It seemed to say: "You'll do!"

"Good-morning, my dear sir, good-morning. You are quite right; this is Mr. Van Cortland. Mr. Van Cortland, this is Mr. Minford, the young gentleman of whom I spoke."

The millionaire extended his hand.

As it reached for an instant to Joe Doubleday's grasp he felt that it was icy cold.

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Minford," he said, quickly.

THE THREE DOORS.

"Mr. Durand has informed you, I presume, of the object of my visit?"

"Pray be seated, gentlemen," replied Joe, who had been studying a book on etiquette, entitled "How to Behave," with the greatest care. "Yes, Mr. Van Cortland, Mr. Durand has been very kind to me—very kind indeed."

Mr. Van Cortland seated himself and coughed nervously.

"I presume he has informed you that I have reason to believe that you are my nephew, son of my deceased sister, Mrs. Grace Minford?" he continued in his nervous way.

"He has, sir."

"As I desire to make certain of this, may I trouble you to answer a question or two?"

"A thousand, if you wish."

"Thank you. You have not always been called by the name you now bear?"

"No, sir. Until I met Mr. Durand in London, some months ago, I supposed my name to be Mudge."

"You are not English?"

"Oh, no, sir. I was brought up in St. Louis by a man named Crutchett."

Mr. Van Cortland started violently.

"His first name?" he asked, in a constrained voice, leaning forward as he spoke.

"Caleb, sir—Caleb Crutchett was his name."

"And his business?"

"When I first remember he was a porter in the Planter's Hotel. Later on he opened a saloon and accumulated a little money."

"Do you recollect anything peculiar about his personal appearance?"

"Yes, sir. He had only one eye."

"Is he dead?"

The question came in so low a tone that Joe could scarcely hear it.

"He is, sir. He sold out his saloon and went home to England about two years ago. He died shortly after, leaving me about a thousand pounds."

The rich man heaved a sigh of relief.

"You don't resemble my deceased sister," he said, slowly. "I have no recollection of your early life, I suppose?"

"None, sir, up to the time I lived with Mr. and Mrs. Crutchett, when I always supposed them to be my parents until I was informed to the contrary by Mr. Durand."

"Then it is to this gentleman that you owe all the knowledge you possess concerning your relationship to me?"

"I have already told you that, Mr. Van Cortland," interposed the head of the private detective firm, speaking now for the first time.

"That is all very well, gentlemen," exclaimed the millionaire, rising with an air of ardent determination.

"The pieces of identity furnished by Mr. Durand seem conclusive. As to the story of Mrs. Grace Minford to my questions tally with them in every respect, but you must understand that this is an important matter. A million of dollars belonging to my sister's estate has been in my hands for a long time awaiting her testator, in case he should ever come to fight. Possibly this young man is that son. I do not know, and I demand

one further test. I must see your naked breast, Mr. Minford—then, and not until then, I shall be able to decide."

"Sir!" exclaimed Joe, starting back in well-feigned astonishment.

At the same time he observed that Mr. Durand was looking the other way.

"I repeat my demand. I must request that you remove a portion of your clothing and exhibit to me your naked breast."

"Can you refer to the blue heart? I always wondered how I came by it——"

"Ah! then it is there?"

The face of Mr. Van Cortland was deadly pale.

"Look for yourself, sir," cried Joe, throwing off his coat and opening up his shirt.

A blue heart was tattooed upon the breast.

Mr. Van Cortland bent forward and examined the tattooing with deep attention.

"It is enough!" he cried at length. "I am satisfied. Mr. Minford, I welcome you as my nephew and heir to my sister's fortune. Henceforth let me request that you make my house your home."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOINGS OF DENNIS O'DAY.

"An' it's a foine evenin', me Eyetalyan frind, providin' that a man has wooden legs what can stand the mud and the slush. Phwat would ye be after taxing me for the full of me bag of satinets?"

It was Mr. Dennis O'Day who spoke.

He had just entered the junk-shop of Guiseppi Donatello, whose sign Harry Ashmore had observed over the basement entrance to the house in which the old coin-dealer made his home.

From the appearance of Mr. O'Day, clothed as he was in old garments, not one of them matching the other, and carrying an empty bag rolled up under his arm, it would seem his line of trade was also junk.

For once appearances did not belie the truth.

Dennis O'Day was a junk-dealer.

His shop, quite as dirty, if not as foul-smelling as that of Donatello, was situated on Chambers street, down in the cellar, directly opposite the house of the three doors.

As it was the evening upon which Harry Ashmore consented to accompany the old coin-dealer, and an exceedingly raw and inclement evening at that, it seemed a trifle strange that it should have been selected by Dennis O'Day to pay a visit to his brother in trade.

His object was barter and exchange.

In his humble cellar in Chambers street stood an uncompleted bale of satinets (a trade term for a certain grade of colored rags), which still lacked several pounds of being the required weight.

The bale had already been ordered, and as the worthy junk-dealer was anxious to close his hands upon the money it would

bring, he had taken his bag and sallied forth to haggle with the trade for the required weight in brass.

So far he had been unsuccessful, and he now entered the cellar of Guiseppi Donatello as a last resort.

Strange to say, he found the Italian more willing to accommodate him than his own countrymen had been.

Signor Donatello had collected the satinets that very day, and had drawn them to his small shop, where he had a counter drawn by a blind horse and provided with a stock of polished bells.

For a slight advance he was willing to turn them over to Dennis O'Day, and the women of his establishment were set at work picking them over, despite of the lateness of the hour.

Not to be behindhand, the man from Chambers street, during the interview, sent out for beer.

The vessel proved to be a veritable growler.

It went out not once, but several times, until at length, long after the satinets were ready and stowed away in the bag and the women had retired to rest, Dennis O'Day and his "Eyetal-pur friend" found themselves stretched on the floor with the empty growler between them, rousing from a drunken sleep.

It was Dennis O'Day who made the discovery.

Guiseppi Donatello was still asleep and indulging in the loudest kind of snores.

"Faix, an' it's after slaping I've been," muttered Dennis, rousing himself. "Oh! me head, me head! Begorra, but the Hy-alan beer is powerful strong."

Staggering to his feet, he looked about him.

There lay his brother tradesman snoring on the rag, and there too was his bag, stuffed two-thirds full of satinets.

Dennis O'Day picked up the bag and well knew it intuitively.

"Where an' I paid the lay then for twinty pound!" he muttered, "and I'm rilly to swear there's no more nor fifteen in the bag."

He looked about him for the scales.

They were nowhere to be seen.

As Dennis was about to arouse the proprietor of the junk shop he happened to recollect that on a previous visit he had noticed the scales beneath a little shed at the top of the steps leading into the back yard.

"The first time I was out here I was late to avoid any suspicion of being a thief," he muttered, "and then, as it can be after midnight, I'll be off for home. Begorra, but won't the old woman kick, though, at me stayin' out so late."

What said Dennis O'Day?

Surely, considering that he was in such a tearing hurry, it is a trifle strange that he should have suffered twenty minutes to elapse before entering the cellar again.

Then his bag, which before had seemed so light, is now decidedly heavy.

From the way in which he handled it one would think it must weigh a hundred pounds at least.

"Good-night to yez," he muttered, shaking his fist at the snoring Italian, as he softly let himself out into the street. "May yer dream be plased, for sure there's the highest satisfaction ye ever could."

In truth, it was as much as Dennis could do to manage the bag at all.

He shifted it now to the right shoulder, now to the left, hurrying through the narrow street, with all possible speed, keeping a wary look out for impulsive policemen to the right and left.

"Howly saints! but I've done it now!" he muttered. "I'm rich—rich—rich! Oh, the purty craythers! won't I make them fly! I'll be an alderman, so I will, and they shall send me to the House of Commons, an' I'll be the richest man in the Pound Market."

Of what was he talking?

Surely not satinets?

And yet satinets were all that Dennis was supposed to have in his bag.

He had turned the corner of Oak street now, and was within plain sight of his home.

As he shot one wary glance up the street he saw before him a man bending over a prostrate figure which lay on the by-walk.

With a smothered exclamation Dennis drew back into the shadow of the triangular house on the side where was situated the office of Durand & Co.

"It's Muster Watson, by all that's good!" he muttered. "Begobs, and there's crooked work here, or I'm a goat. Phwat's he doin'? Howly saints, but it's murder! If I want to git square with the ould scoundrel for the trick he wanst serve me, now's me time."

At this instant the man rose, and hurriedly entered Christopher Watson's door.

With the quickness of thought Dennis O'Day had shot across the street, and dropped his bag down a flight of cellar steps.

Then, hurrying to the place where the body of the prostrate man lay stretched upon the path, he slung it upon his back and disappeared down the cellar steps on the opposite side of the street.

No sooner had he accomplished this movement—and it had been executed with the utmost rapidity—than the door of the money-changer's office softly opened, and four men crept out into the street.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the foremost in a faltering whisper, "the body is gone!"

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER GOLDEN VISION.

Was Harry Ashmore dreaming again?

To himself it appeared so, for it seemed as though he could hear the voices of dream phantoms muttering about him.

Had he been in a vision?

What could this waking pain be?—

He could remember going home with the old individual, remember his mother's dream, and what he had dreamed to be his dream, and how, which took him a fevered and delirious over the scene, clinging to the hand of a stranger, and all in pursuit of peace, with his head full.

Then came the sudden shock, as though a ball had struck him on his side.

Was it not all a dream?

Could it be possible that he was still in the loft above the old coin-dealer's room—his head whirled so that he could not even think.

Such were the thoughts floating through the brain of Harry Ashmore at the moment of opening his eyes.

Then it all came back to him.

It had been no dream. He was lying stretched upon a heap of ill-smelling rags in the rear of what seemed to be a little shop.

He put out his hand and tried to rise.

Only then did he become aware of how weak he was, and that his shirt, vest and coat were saturated with blood.

He had been shot then—it was an actual fact!

With reeling brain, and trembling in every limb, he sank back on the rags too weak to utter a sound.

It was at that moment that the murmuring voices in the apartment beyond the one in which he lay began to make some impression on his mind.

They were the voices of two men who seemed to be earnestly discussing some subject of great importance to themselves.

After a moment Harry found strength to open his eyes and survey the surrounding scene.

The room in which he lay was wholly dark and contained little else save rags.

From the appearance of the walls, which were of stone, and the confined, moldy atmosphere which pervaded the place, Harry came to the immediate conclusion that during the interval of unconsciousness which had succeeded his fall to the sidewalk he had been carried to some apartment underground.

The room beyond, into which he could, as he lay, look without difficulty, seemed to bear out this conclusion, for its walls were also of stone, and at one end a flight of steps could be seen leading to regions above.

In one corner of the apartment stood an old-fashioned cooking-stove, its legs supported by four bricks, before which sat two men in earnest conversation, one in an old paralytic-looking rocking-chair, the other upon a low stool.

Everywhere about were scattered heaps of old iron, brass and pewter, bags stuffed with assorted rags, white and colored, together with all the varying paraphernalia of a junk-dealer's shop.

But, weak and faint as he was, Harry Ashmore had no eyes for all this.

He would probably have closed his eyes again—perhaps even sunk off into unconsciousness—had it not been for the sudden mention on the part of one of the men at the stove of a familiar name:

"Christopher Watson."

It was the name he had read on the sign above the door through which the burglars had disappeared.

Harry, with a great effort, threw himself a little higher up on the pile of rags, so as to command a view of the speakers, and listened.

One was a rough-looking Irishman, who, in his shirt sleeves, sat smoking a short clay pipe—easily recognizable to our readers as Mr. Dennis O'Day. The other—it was the one on the

stool—was a short, dried-up old specimen of humanity, with grizzled hair and beard, and only one available eye.

Evidently it was this man who had given utterance to the name of the money-changer, for he now repeated it again.

"So you are down on Christopher Watson, are you? Better be careful, O'Day. I tell you he's a dangerous man."

"Go way wid yez. It's not Dinnis O'Day that's afeard of him. He's chated me more than wanst, so he has, and, be-gorra, I'll get square wid him now."

"Cheated you? How has he cheated you?"

"Sure, an' didn't I sell him a lot of ould notes what I found amongst the waste paper for tin cents, thinking they were no good, only to hear from wan of his clerks that he sold them for a thousand dollars."

"Well, well, they may have been useless to you, yet valuable to him."

"Go way wid yez. Don't be after givin' me no such nonsense. Why didn't he tell me phat they were worth? May the bogies fly away wid him! Answer me, man—why didn't he do that?"

"Tut, tut, you are talking nonsense. But tell me, are you sure that he shot this boy?"

"Sure—man, I'm sartin! Wasn't I just comin' round the corner of Oak street, when I seed him bending over his body on the sidewalk? Then, little draming that the eye of Dinnis O'Day was upon him, he gave a lep through his dure as though he wur shot out through a gun."

"But some one else may have fired the shot—did you hear any report?"

"Sorra a wan."

"That's against your theory, then."

"Is it? Then what for did himself and three of his min come running out into the street a minute after, to see where the body had gone?"

"How can I tell? But you have brought me here, O'Day, in the dead of night—now what is it you propose?"

"That you open ould Watson's dure—you know how the job is done—and we'll carry the body of the lad in and lay it on the flure, where it'll be found the morrer, and the police called in. I'll cook up a story of what I seen that'll do the rist."

The one-eyed man gave utterance to a contemptuous grunt.

"Your stupid vindictiveness will get you into trouble before you die, O'Day," he growled. "I don't remember ever hearin' of a plan more absurd; but as I am in need of money, I'll open the door for you in the most approved fashion, if the pay is right."

Dennis O'Day chuckled.

"I knowed you wid," he answered, "and as I'm bound to get square with ould Watson, I'll pass over your share upon meself. Now, how would five dollars strike you for the job?"

"Five what? O'Day, you are simply a fool."

"Go 'way wid yez! an' don't be after callin' names to your betters. If yer civil I'll make it tin."

"You'll make it twenty-five if you want me to do the job. If you haggle any more about it I won't do it at all."

"Ah! but ye're a hard wan," muttered Dennis, as he counted out the money. "Howsomedever, there's nothin' mean about me, an' it's many a favor I've done you in the past, and many's the more I hope I'll be able to do yez agin. Come, it's goin' on."

toward two o'clock; will ye creep acrost the street an' do it now?"

"As well now as any time," was the answer. "I'll be back in a jiffy, O'Day."

Then from his place of observation on the top of the rag heap Harry saw the one-eyed man rise from the stool, ascend the stone steps and disappear.

What could it all mean?

He was too weak to make any resistance, therefore there was nothing for it but to make known his return to consciousness at once.

Probably Harry would have taken this step, had not curiosity restrained him.

No sooner had the one-eyed man departed than Dennis O'Day, slipping up the steps and locking a door, returned, and seizing a bag which stood in one corner, dragged it out into the middle of the cellar.

The bag seemed to be enormously heavy, although through the mouth, which was open, Harry could see that it was filled with rags.

In one corner stood a great tierce filled with scrap-iron. This the junk-dealer now grasped, and overturning it, emptied its contents upon the cellar floor.

The noise made by the rattling iron was so great that Harry could not have made his voice heard even if he had tried.

But the singular part of these maneuvers, and that which sent a strange thrill through the heart of Harry Ashmore, was yet to come.

No sooner was the tierce empty than Dennis O'Day seized the bag, and raising it with difficulty, began to empty its contents into the tierce.

It was not rags that fell from the bag.

It was a stream of glittering gold.

CHAPTER X.

DETECTIVE JELIFFE.

"First-class French cook wanted. Mrs. Sniggers, 1102 Fifth avenue. Wages twenty dollars a month. How'll that suit you?"

"That will skate well enough if I kin git it, young man, but d'yez think I could be after passing meself off as a French woman when the dear knows I was never nearer to France than the County Cork?"

"It makes no difference. Two dollars fee, if you please. Thank you. Here are the directions; you want to go to the house of Mrs. Sniggers at once. If you don't get the place reported to us, and we'll see what can be done. Next!"

It was an every day conversation in the intelligence office of Hammel & Co., on the Chambers street side of the house of the three doors.

From morning until night, week in and week out, servants and employers were coming and going in that well-known establishment, keeping the clerks fully occupied listening to applications and complaints and taking in the cash.

Hammel & Co. did an extensive business.

By competent judges it had been estimated that more servants were hired, two to one, from their intelligence office than from any other in the city of New York.

The office, which was up one flight of stairs, was handsomely finished off with hard wood counters, brass railings, etc., rare in those days, although common enough among our business offices now, while upon the double row of settees occupying one side of the office servants unemployed or waiting for calls could be found at almost any hour in the day.

It was on a pleasant June morning, some three months subsequent to the unexpected transfer of Joe Doubleday, the street fakir, from the life of a wandering outcast to that of a member of one of the richest households in New York that the above conversation took place.

As the applicant for the vacancy in the kitchen of Mrs. Sniggers left the office of Hammel & Co. she passed the proprietor himself upon the stairs.

His dress and general appearance were much the same as when encountered by Joe Doubleday on that night ever memorable.

The black broadcloth of winter had been exchanged for the lighter clothes of summer, but he still wore the green spectacles concealing his eyes, and presented the same quick, business-like manner in all he said and did.

Passing through the intelligence office to his private room with a slight nod to the clerks, Mr. Hammel removed his hat and gloves, threw a bundle of papers upon the desk behind which he seated himself and touched his bell.

One of the clerks appeared in answer.

"Who is outside there, Bates?" asked Mr. Hammel, glancing over his paper as he spoke.

"Well, sir, there is Bridget O'Reilly, late cook at the Briggs', Patrick Ryan, coachman for Colonel Cavanagh—I believe there is no one else that you would care to see."

"Very good. Show in Ryan. You may tell the woman to come to-morrow. I haven't time to talk with her to-day."

A red-headed Irishman in coachman's livery entered a moment later and stood beside the desk.

"Well, and what have you to report, Ryan?" demanded the keeper of the intelligence office, without raising his head from the letter which he had begun to write.

"Things are much the same, sor. Colonel Cavanagh is getting deeper in debt every day."

"Ah! Is the colonel gambling much now?"

"Mighty heavy, sor. He's at it every night. It's often three and four in the morning whin I fetch him home in me coach."

"Indeed! Tradesmen running him pretty hard for what he owes?"

"They are at the house every day, sor. I don't believe he can stave thim off much longer, and that's a fact."

"Very well, Ryan. Go back to your work and keep a sharp lookout. Report to me at once if anything occurs."

As the man departed Mr. Hammel, taking a book from one of the drawers of his desk, made a few hurried entries.

"Almost time to squeeze my ball Colonel Cavanagh," he muttered. "If he keeps that up this way another month I shall have him just where I want him, and my dear."

Under the thumb of Hammel & Co.!

There were many—very many—of the so-called rich householders of New York already in that very position, as, to their sorrow, they were well aware.

The conversation held with the coachman was only a sample.

Similar conversations were held in the private offices of Hammel & Co. every day in the week.

Were the servants sent out from the noted intelligence office but so many spies on the evil doings of their masters?

It certainly looked that way.

"Mr. Henry Mudge," said the clerk, opening the door and ushering in a stylishly-dressed young man into the private office of Hammel & Co.

Mr. Hammel started at the announcement.

He had been looking out of the window for a moment or more, with his eyes riveted upon a man who could be seen standing quietly in a doorway on the opposite side of Chambers street, his gaze upon the house of the three doors.

Whether it was his imagination or not, it seemed to him that the man's eyes were particularly directed toward the open window beside which he himself was sitting.

Now, inasmuch as Mr. Hammel recognized in the man John J. Jelfe, the noted police detective, the sight did not seem to him unusual.

Turning his eyes squarely upon the window, he greeted the newcomer cordially and ordered him to a seat.

"Well, Mr. Double—— I beg your pardon, Mr. Mudge—— How are matters progressing with you?"

"Slowly," answered our old acquaintance, Joe Doubleday, flinging himself into the chair in a manner which he considered, no doubt, the height of elegance. "Matters move confoundedly slow. I am very much at home in the house of my uncle, Van Cortland, it is true, but I have seen nothing of that million dollars yet that you promised me, and I must have more money at once if you expect me to keep up my end."

The face of Mr. Hammel was dark. For several minutes he did not speak.

"Things have not worked just to suit me in your case, Mr. Mudge," he said slowly, dwelling with marked emphasis on Joe's assumed name. "The fact is Durand & Co., the private detectives around the corner in whose interest I engaged you, seem to be moving decidedly slow."

"I should say so," answered Joe, crossly. "I want my share of the money, and must have it. This easy-going life in the lap of luxury is all very well, but when there's no cash in the box to back it up, and Uncle Van Cortland is liable to discover any day that——"

"Hush! hush!" whispered the keeper of the intelligence office, "don't breathe the true position. How do you progress in your suit with the girl?"

"Don't progress for a cent. She don't like me, and loses no opportunity to show her dislike."

"Indeed? Well, I shall speak to Durand & Co. to-day. Matters must be hurried up. Meanwhile here is another five hundred dollars for your current expenses. Try to make it go as far as you can."

When the detective had departed Mr. Hammel looked out of the window again.

Detective Jelfe was still standing in the doorway looking up at the house.

"Confound the fellow!" he muttered angrily. "This thing has got to stop."

He opened the door and made a signal to Bates, the clerk.

Then he shut the door again, and was heard to lock it on the inside.

As the hours passed the business of the intelligence office continued.

Not a sound was heard in the private room of Mr. Hammel, the window was closed, the door remained closed, the shades were pulled down to their full length.

To all who asked for him personally it was stated that Mr. Hammel was "out of town."

Meanwhile—it was perhaps a quarter of an hour after the departure of Joe Doubleday from the Oak street entrance to the house of the three doors—there emerged the portly form of Mr. Simon Durand, of the private detective agency of Durand & Co.

He was dressed in a full suit of black, wore a shiny black beaver, neatly polished shoes, and carried a gold-headed cane.

His face bore a complacent, self-satisfied air, causing him to appear like a man fresh from a good dinner, well pleased with himself and the world.

Sauntering around into Chambers street, he chanced to pass the doorway in which stood Detective Jelfe, still watching the offices of Hammel & Co.

"Ah! Mr. Jelfe, good-morning," he said, stopping and shaking the detective warmly by the hand. "Out on business this beautiful morning, or is it pleasure that brings you down my way?"

The detective started at the sound of his voice.

Nevertheless he shook hands with Mr. Durand as one greets an old time acquaintance casually met.

"Business, my dear sir, business. You ought to know me well enough by this time to be aware that pleasure is something in which I seldom indulge."

"Just so," replied Durand, his black eyes snapping. "When you were with our firm, Mr. Jelfe, you were always busy—the one man on whom we could always depend."

To this compliment the detective only bowed.

"Call in and see us, Jelfe, when you are passing," said Durand, moving away. "Drop in and out often—always glad to see you and have you make yourself at home. Good-day. Hope you'll get your man."

"And I hope so, too, Simon Durand," muttered Detective Jelfe, with his eyes fixed upon the retreating figure of his former employer. "And if I do, you sly old fox, I shall owe no thanks to you."

CHAPTER XI.

FURTHER ACCOUNT OF THE DOINGS OF DENNIS O'DAY.

Gold!

Yes, gold!

From the bag held in the hands of Dennis O'Day the golden coins were running into the tierce in a yellow stream.

It was more than Harry Ashmore could stand.

Without giving a thought to the probable consequences of an act so injudicious, he gave utterance to one low, startled exclamation of surprise.

With precipitate haste the junk-dealer thrust the bag into the tierce, regardless of what remainder of gold it might contain, and sprang through the open doorway.

"Howly sailor, but the bye's alive!" was the cry which escaped his pallid lips.

It was a ticklish position for Harry Ashmore.

Utterly powerless to move and afraid to speak, he lay there helpless upon the rags regarding the movements of Dennis O'Day with a keenness of interest bred of despair.

He had not the faintest idea where he was.

That he had been picked up in the street unconscious and brought to the place where he lay he well understood, but this said, with the exception of such hints as had been let fall by Dennis O'Day in his conversation with the one-eyed man, he knew no more.

Previous to the bursting of this vision of a bag filled with gold pieces upon him Harry had been utterly at a loss to comprehend the motive of the junk-man in bringing him to this place at all. Now he felt certain of one thing, namely, that in the person of this man who now sprang toward him he beheld one, at least, of the robbers who had possessed themselves of the contents of old Peter Stanton's treasure chests, and one of the men whom he had followed from the old coin-dealer's house.

The thought was by no means a cheering one.

Nevertheless, it lent new stimulus to Harry Ashmore's failing strength.

"Keep back there!" he cried, striving to rise from the rags. "I—I have some strength left! I can defend myself yet! I—"

An inarticulate, gurgling sound completed the sentence.

The fingers of Dennis O'Day were about his throat.

"Whist, whist, ye little brat!" he muttered, tightening his grasp until Harry was black in the face. "Is it stringth yer affther boastin' of? Sure, an Dinny O'Day, what has downed five Kerry min. has stringth enough for tin such shrimps as you!"

The gurgle was followed by a quick gasp, the gasp by a groan or two, and then all was still.

The body of Harry Ashmore fell back upon the rags motionless.

It was then that the junk-dealer loosed his hold.

"Begorra, an' I hope I ain't kilt him," he muttered, gazing curiously upon the blackened, upturned face of the boy. "I didn't mane to do that; but thin, by the same token, phwat was wan to do? Not to let him out to howl from the house-tops that he seen Denny O'Day wid a barrel of gowld!"

He placed his hand upon the boy's heart.

There was a faint, fluttering motion for a single instant, and then, to the excited imagination of O'Day, it had ceased to beat.

"Howly saints, but he is did, though!" exclaimed the man,

looking around with an air of alarm. "I've done it—I'm a murderer! I wisht to hiven I'd let the old codger's gowld alone, or lift the bye in the street before I'd a-brought this sin upon me sowl."

He gazed around the dimly lighted shop with a frightened air.

From behind each barrel and bag, from out of the great pile of rags itself, it seemed as though a multitude of faces were gazing upon him, and pointing toward him the finger of reproach.

Perhaps it was fright; but whatever the cause, certain it is that these phantom forms took upon themselves a reality which served to drive all other thoughts from the mind of the terrified junk-dealer, and spurred him on to action as he had never been spurred before.

He seemed to wholly forget his bargain with the one-eyed burglar, his desire to wreak revenge upon his neighbor Watson, the money-changer, in the house of the three doors, and to become possessed of one idea alone—to remove the body of the boy from out of his sight.

And when we mention that for a week past Dennis O'Day had not drawn one sober breath, his vagaries may, in a measure at least, stand explained.

Bending over Harry Ashmore, he picked up his light for as easily as though it had been one of his own rag bags, and flinging it upon his back, stole up the cellar steps, stopping only to lock the door behind him, and gained the street.

It was wholly dark and deserted.

On the opposite side of the way was the house of the three doors, in front of which ought to have been the one-eyed man, providing he was fulfilling his bargain, plying his burglary trade in trying to gain entrance to Christopher Watson's money-changing shop.

But even the one-eyed burglar had disappeared.

The money-changing shop of Christopher Watson was shrouded in general gloom.

Without turning his eyes to the right or the left the frightened junk-dealer hurried into Oak street, past the detective agency of Durand & Co., into New Chambers street, and on to the corner of Pearl.

Here an empty truck stood drawn up beside the curb.

It offered just the opportunity sought for by Dennis O'Day.

"Lie there, now," he muttered, as he threw the formless form of Harry Ashmore upon it. "Ye'll be affther tellin' no tales agin Denny O'Day now, I fancy. To-morrow I'll quit the Fourth Ward altogether, an' sorra a soul will iver know how I came to fill me bag with thim shinin' gowld pieces wid the Eyetalyan's satinets."

CHAPTER XII.

ROBBED OF HALF A MILLION.

"I've been robbed of half a million in gold!"

"What!" exclaimed the servant of the one-eyed man, looking strangely at the man who approached the door in the dead of night, making this astounding statement. "Robbed of half a million in gold! Nonsense! You can't be dead!"

And indeed it would seem so.

The man who had just rushed into the station looked the madman in every sense of the word, nor did his speech belie his looks.

He was tall and thin, with long, white hair streaming about his neck and shoulders from beneath a battered hat, his clothes were old and shabby and torn, his form was bent with age.

As he stood before the desk his limbs trembled violently, and his eyes, wild and gleaming with strange light, roved uneasily from side to side.

"What's your name? Where do you live?" demanded the sergeant, seeking to calm the man's excitement by the addition of a few well-chosen words.

"My name is Peter Stanton. I live at No. — Mulberry street. I repeat, I am not mad. I have been robbed of half a million in gold."

"Mulberry street is a poor street in which to keep secreted a treasure like that, my friend," said the sergeant. "Are you sure you have made no mistake?"

"Am I sure? Am I sure? Do you ask me if I am sure, when for many long years I have toiled to save this gold that, I might have wealth to bestow on my boy? I begin to think that all the world is mad, and that I alone am sane!"

"It's t'other way about, old man, I'm thinking. Come, tell me all about it, so that I may know what to do."

And the sergeant, with the air of a man about to listen to an entertaining story, of which he did not expect to believe a word, leaned back in his chair and began to pick his teeth with a quill.

"I want help," said the old man wildly. "I want help to get back my gold. I was a fool to keep it as I did, stowed away in my great chests in the room. I might have known they would get it some time, for they're a bad lot around me, an evil lot, and now they've done it at last."

"How did they do it?"

"Come in through the window by aid of a ladder. They chloroformed me first, and then put the gold in bags."

"How do you know if you were unconscious?"

"I was not unconscious all of the time; I came to myself just as they were getting out of the window—then I lost my senses again. When I woke up I found the boy gone too, and so I came here."

"The boy—what boy? Do you mean your son?"

"My son! No. Would that it were. He was a young man who saved my life, and I took him home."

"Perhaps he was one of the robbers?"

"I don't think so. I have a dim recollection, as I lay there unconscious on the floor, of seeing the boy run down the ladder from the loft where he slept and follow the burglars who carried the bags out of the window."

"Now, now," said the sergeant, "you don't expect me to believe any such yarn as this. I think the best thing I can do with you old man, is to put you in a cell until morning. I don't think you are fit to go round alone. When daylight comes you will have forgotten all about your gold."

The old man leaned against the desk helplessly.

"Will nothing I can say convince you of the truth?" in-

breathed. "I tell you, captain, I am not mad. There are many in this city who know me. Strange as my story may seem to you, I can assure you of its truth."

"Why, man, three burglars could not carry off half a million in gold!" cried the sergeant impatiently. "They could not even lift it from the ground."

"Ah, there is just where I have failed to make myself understood. It is true that the treasure stolen from my chest was all in gold, but it was not all in modern coin."

"Not in modern coin? What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. A certain quantity was in twenty-dollar gold pieces—thirty thousand dollars, perhaps—but the rest, and by far the most valuable part, was in the coins of the ancient Romans, Greeks and Egyptians—all gold, mind you—and many little coins, not weighing the eighth of an ounce, were worth hundreds of dollars to collectors who are willing to spend their money for such things."

The sergeant looked at the old man sharply.

A great change had come over his manner as these last words were spoken.

"I begin to understand," he said slowly, "and, what is more, I think I remember you now. Keep a little stand, don't you, for the sale of old coins up against the railings of St. Paul's churchyard fence?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the old man, eagerly. "I have been there for ten years and over. These were my little savings. Now they are all gone—all gone! I am left old, half blind and alone, with nothing to leave to my son, if I should ever find him, which I hope to do."

"Then you have lost a son?"

"Yes—years ago. But no matter about that. What I want is an officer to trace up the thieves—some one to help me to get back my gold."

"Well, you shall have one," said the sergeant. "Your story shall be investigated, Mr. Stanton, and if we find—come, where have we here?"

It was the entrance of two men into the police station that thus caused the sergeant to exclaim.

One was a policeman in full uniform, the other a certain well-known detective—John Jeliffe, by name. They bore between them the lifeless body of a young man, who, as far as outward appearance went, seemed to be dead.

It was Harry Ashmore.

By Detective Jeliffe he had been discovered on the cart at the corner of New Chamber Street and Pearl, where he had been left by Dennis O'Day.

They carried him into the station and laid him on the floor almost at the old coin-dealer's feet.

"Great heavens! it is the boy!" he cried. "It is the boy to whom I gave lodgings for the night."

"Glad you know him," said the detective. "I found him down in Pearl street lying on a truck. He has a bullet hole in his side for one thing, and has been choked most terribly for another. It's my belief that he is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Peter Stanton in an awe-stricken voice. "Dead, and in defense of my gold. Poor fellow, poor fellow! He saved my life yesterday evening—would to God I could restore his now!"

Meanwhile the sergeant, who had descended from his seat behind the desk and joined the group in the centre of the room, knelt beside the body, and loosening the shirt, bared the breast and placed his hand in the region of the heart.

"He certainly seems to be dead," he said, slowly, "and yet the body is not cold."

What ailed the old coin-dealer?

If he was not mad before, he certainly seemed so now!

His face was as white as his hair. His eyes seemed starting out of his head.

It was upon the blue heart tattooed on Harry Ashmore's breast which had so excited Mr. Christopher Watson that the old man's gaze was riveted.

For an instant he looked upon it, then, sinking on his knees, he bent down to obtain a closer view.

"Gone! all gone!" he cried in agony. "First the gold, then——"

The sentence remained uncompleted.

Old Peter Stanton, the coin-dealer, fell suddenly forward, fainting upon the body of Harry Ashmore as it lay upon the floor.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE HUNT FOR OLD COINS.

THEY were wrong, one and all, in pronouncing Harry Ashmore dead.

In spite of his wound, in spite of the choking of Dennis O'Day, the young man lived, though many weary weeks were destined to elapse before he should become his old self again.

Those weeks were spent in the Bellevue Hospital, whither they removed Harry, all unconscious as he was, upon that fearful night.

Peter Stanton, the old coin-dealer, insisted upon accompanying him to the hospital.

Recovering almost immediately from his swoon, faint, or spell, or by whatever name one may choose to call it, the old man's whole aspect seemed to have suddenly changed.

To be sure, he was as anxious for the recovery of his gold as ever, but his chief anxiety seemed to be for the boy, who, with life still hanging on a thread, lay stretched at his feet.

What had caused this sudden change was the question which puzzled the sergeant of the 4th precinct station, and also Detective John Jelffe, who had, through chancing to pass the truck upon which Harry Ashmore lay unconscious, become connected with the case of the stolen gold.

And the old man let it puzzle them.

For the recovery of his gold and the conviction of the thieves he offered a liberal reward.

The case made a great stir in the papers, also, for it transpired that many of the ancient gold coins possessed by Peter Stanton were unique specimens of great value and historical interest. By the rich and influential coin-collectors of New York and other cities it was well known that these rare pieces were in the old dealer's possession, and their disappearance filled several learned societies with consternation lest these

precious relics of antiquity, which they had at one time hoped to possess, should be consigned to the melting-pot and lost to the world forever.

Therefore the learned societies joined issue with Peter Stanton and themselves offered a reward for the recovery of certain coins, published in a long list in the advertising columns of the daily papers for weeks to come.

It all proved useless.

When Harry Ashmore, after a violent attack of brain fever, recovered his senses at last, he could not remember to what part of the city he had followed the burglars, nor could he give any information which seemed to afford a tangible clew.

His story was listened to by some of the most noted detectives of New York, but they were all at fault when attempts were made to locate the place.

After the young man's wound healed and he became able to move about he was taken to junk-shop after junk-shop, in hope that he would be able to recognize the one in which he had seen the bag of gold.

Every such move resulted only in failure.

Dennis O'Day, carrying out his intentions, had moved a long way up-town on the West Side, consequently his establishment was not taken into consideration at all.

During Harry Ashmore's long confinement in Bellevue Hospital the coin-dealer visited him daily.

It would seem that the burglars had not made quite a clean sweep of the old man's savings, for he still seemed to find means of subsistence and to provide Harry with clothes and many luxuries as well.

During these visits he questioned the young man repeatedly concerning his early life, without learning much, however, for Harry had but little to tell.

He had been brought up in Chicago by the man Reynolds, had been kindly treated, sent to school, and later served a year or so in a book-store. When Reynolds, his guardian, had died, Harry, losing his place through the failure of the firm, had come to New York in search of work.

This was really all he had to tell.

Although Peter Stanton made him repeat this story over and over again, he never commented upon it.

Several times he asked to be allowed to examine the blue heart tattooed on the young man's breast, and would inquire how it came there.

As Harry could not answer this question, the heart having been there as far back as his recollection extended, the old man would shake his head dreamily and say no more.

Fearful, no doubt, of being robbed of the little that remained to him, he had removed from Mulberry street to a tenement in Varick street, and in this place Harry Ashmore took up his residence when he had so far recovered as to be able to leave the hospital.

Whatever may have been the work at which Peter Stanton had intended to employ him, it seemed now to have been forgotten.

A part of the day was devoted to the old coin stand at St. Paul's churchyard, of which Harry sometimes took charge, the remainder to wandering about town, and on the various money-changers' offices in search of rare and valuable coins.

"If we look long enough we are bound to come across some of the stolen pieces," the old man had said. "They will be sure to leak out one by one, and I should know them at a glance."

And to this work Harry gave himself up with untiring zeal.

At four o'clock each day the boards upon which the stock in trade of the dealer were tacked were stowed away in a neighboring shop, and together they would start off on a tour of exploration, visiting every money-changing establishment and pawnbroker's on Chatham street, the Bowery and in other localities, rummaging over boxes and bags of foreign coin in search of the missing treasures stolen from the old man's chests.

It seemed strange that in all these expeditions they should have overlooked the money-changing office of Christopher Watson on the Chambers street side of the house of the three doors.

Such, however, was the case, until late on a certain afternoon in June the recollection that such a place existed suddenly dawned upon Peter Stanton, and at his suggestion they turned their steps in that direction, shortly after closing the stand for the day.

As they turned out of Chatham street into Chambers Harry began to look about him curiously.

"Do you know it seems to me that this is the place to which the burglars drove?" he said, as they approached the house of the three doors.

The old coin-dealer grasped his arm nervously.

"Are you sure?" he whispered. "Try and remember! Boy, I lost a fortune that night—a fortune which it was my intention to pass on to my son if God ever saw fit to restore him to me."

The old man's face grew pale as he thought of his lost son, though when he spoke he tried to be cheerful, but he never seemed willing to tell.

"What do you see?" replied Harry, "but still I cannot speak positively." The two men crowded into a short space that night.

"What is it? What do you see?"

The old man's face started suddenly, and with a wild, excited look in his eyes he rushed into the window of Christopher Watson's shop.

There was a small display of coin in the window, a little pile of gold pieces here, another of silver there, also a collection of old copper cents and a number of bank bills scattered about.

"Look! look!" cried the old dealer, pointing to a curiously shaped gold coin of antique appearance which occupied a prominent position in the window. "Boy, we have found what we have been looking for at last! Do you see that coin? It is an ancient gold piece of Ptolemy Soter, King of Egypt, struck 360 years before Christ. It is mine—I could swear to it among a thousand, for I got it in Cairo myself!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A SINGULAR DISAPPEARANCE.

As the old man rushed into Christopher Watson's window he had been looking at the coin attentively.

During the three weeks and more he had made his home with the old dealer he had come to know something about ancient coins and their value, and a very interesting subject he found it, by the way.

"You are sure there is no mistake about it?" he whispered to the old dealer as together they stood gazing attentively at the gold piece. "Might there not have been more than one such piece?—two coins of the same issue, it seems to me, may easily look alike."

"Not of these—not of these," replied the old man, hastily. "I tell you I cannot be mistaken. I was once offered five hundred dollars for that very piece, and, as things have turned out, I was a fool not to have taken it. It's mine, I tell you; it's mine!"

"Well, what shall we do?"

"Go in and demand it. It belongs to me, and I'll make them give it up."

"No—no; that would be foolishness. Let us think a moment. The more I look at this place the more certain I am that it was here the attack was made on me, and to this house the men came with the bags. I think we had better see Detective Joffe. He has taken a great interest in the case, and—Confound it! he will spoil it all in his haste!"

For the old dealer, whose mind seemed to be in that peculiar state that loses all control of itself under excitement, had made a sudden dart up the steps of Christopher Watson's shop, and before Harry could raise a hand to stop him had burst violently in.

"I want that gold Ptolemy in the window!" he shouted: "it's mine—I got it in Egypt—it was stolen from my room!"

As it was too late to exercise caution now, there remained nothing for Harry Ashmore to do but follow.

When he got into the store—and he was not long about it—he found the old coin-dealer raving and storming at a terrific rate, while the clerk behind the counter stood dumbly staring at him as though he were some madman let loose.

"Give me my coin!" he roared, pounding on the counter with his clenched fist. "You're a pack of thieves! Robbers! Burglars! I can prove it! Give me my coin, I say, and tell me what you have done with the rest of my gold!"

"Heh! heh! for heaven's sake!" whispered Harry, plucking the excited man by the sleeve. "This is no way to get back what you have lost."

But the old coin-dealer refused to heed him.

So loud were his shouts and so emphatic his demonstrations that they brought Christopher Watson himself out from the room behind the shop.

The money-changer was a spare man of medium height, with a thin face and a piercing black eye.

He was dressed in a cheap, ready-made business suit, and was evidently nearsighted, for he wore a pair of spectacles with large glasses curiously curved inward in such a manner as to give a peculiar expression to his face.

At the sight of his singular visitors he moved back a step or two with a startled air. Then, recovering himself on the instant, he shot one piercing glance at Harry Ashmore, and moved quickly forward into the shop.

"What in thunder is all this racket about?" he exclaimed.

"Jenkins, why don't you call in an officer and have this old crank put out?"

"I was just thinking of doing so," answered the clerk. "He claims that old coin in the window as his."

"Nonsense! I bought that of a sailor last week. It's for sale, if he wants to buy it, but I'll have him to understand that he can't come here to bully me."

"It's mine—it's mine!" fairly yelled Mr. Stanton, now losing all control of himself. "You are all a pack of thieves in here! Give me my coin, or I'll call the police!"

"Call an officer, Jenkins!" exclaimed the broker, pale with rage. "Old man, if you don't hold your noise I'll make things warm for you, now make no mistake."

His words seemed to only serve to add to the coin-dealer's rage.

He stamped and swore, uttering all the while the most violent threats in spite of everything that Harry Ashmore could do or say.

Meanwhile Jenkins, the clerk, hurrying out into the street in search of an officer, by a singular chance ran plump into the arms of Detective Jeliffe, who happened to be passing at the time.

Now Jenkins knew Detective Jeliffe.

Their acquaintance had been formed at the time when the latter was in the employ of Durand & Co.

Hurriedly stating his case, in company with the detective he started to return to the money-changer's shop.

Did Christopher Watson see them coming?

It is hard to say, but certain it is that at the very instant they appeared around the New Chambers street corner of the house of the three doors he retreated precipitately into the back room, leaving the shop and all it contained to the mercy of the old coin-dealer, who was stamping up and down the floor, roaring like an enraged bull.

No sooner had he entered the room behind the shop than the door was violently shut, and Harry Ashmore, observing this new move with some amazement—saw a hand suddenly projected from behind a thick curtain which concealed the interior of the back room from view.

By the hand a small circular card of a red color was suspended to a nail in such a manner as to be visible through the panes of the glass door.

Then the hand was suddenly withdrawn and all sound in the back room ceased.

It was then that Detective Jeliffe entered.

He was recognized by Peter Stanton at once, who, in his excited way, began to explain.

Jenkins, the clerk, meanwhile, with one hasty glance at the back door, had taken his place behind the counter, and stood there with his face as unexpressive as a block of wood.

"Now see here, Mr. Stanton," said the detective, when the old man had stated his case, "there is no use in making so much noise about all this. Mr. Watson is a respectable and honest man. If there is anything wrong he will, no doubt, make it right. Jenkins, where is he?"

"No," replied the clerk, "I said he was out."

"But I am certain——"

"You must have misunderstood me, Jeliffe. Mr. Watson had an important engagement which he was just going to keep. I said he was out."

"It's no such thing!" cried Harry, speaking up. "The man I suppose to be Mr. Watson just went into that back room."

"You are mistaken, young man," said the clerk, stolidly. "He followed me out of the shop. There, if you don't believe me, look for yourselves."

And Jenkins, the clerk, threw open the door leading to the room behind Christopher Watson's shop.

If Christopher Watson had gone in there, it seemed more than strange, but it was unoccupied now.

More than that, there was but one door to the room—the one the clerk had just thrown open—and the only window, which opened upon an interior court-yard, was closed and fastened on the inside.

CHAPTER XV.

AN INTERVIEW—A BURGLARY ON FIFTH AVENUE.

THE frequent presence of Detective Jeliffe in the immediate neighborhood of the house of the three doors needs explanation.

The reason was two-fold.

First, John Jeliffe was a ward detective, and the especial district under his charge happened to contain within its limits the house of the three doors.

This reason, though excellent, does not entirely fill the bill.

On the occasion of Joe Doubleday's visit to the offices of Hammel & Co., to make his demand for money, it was observed that Detective Jeliffe seemed to have the house of the three doors itself particularly under his eye.

This brings us to our second reason, which will be better understood if we admit the reader to a private conversation which took place between Detective Jeliffe and Mr. Van Cortland in the library of the latter's mansion on Fifth avenue.

It was the evening of the day upon which had been made the discovery of the stolen Egyptian coin in the window of Christopher Watson's money-changer's shop.

The sudden and mysterious disappearance of the broker had served to perplex Detective Jeliffe greatly, as had also the finding of the coin in the window; also the statement made later by Harry Ashmore that it was to the house of the three doors he had followed the robbers of the old coin-dealer's gold.

Quieting Peter Stanton as best he could, the detective per-
turn to his home.

"I'll call round at the stand to-morrow and have a talk with you," he said. "If Ashmore is right, and this Mr. Watson, whom I have known to bear an excellent reputation for many years, is a thief, no amount of vigilance will ever serve to expose him in his present position. I shall have to throw him on his guard, if it has not done so already, and will most effectually prevent us from accomplishing anything at all."

It was some hours after taking leave of Harry Ashmore and the old coin-dealer that Detective Jeliffe, in accordance with a previous engagement, presented himself at the door of the millionaire.

Now, John Jeliffe was no stranger to Mr. Van Cortland.

During the latter part of that gentleman's business career he had been president of the Nineteenth National Bank on Wall street, and it was through his instrumentality that Jeliffe had obtained the position of a detective for the bank, which position he had held for several years at a large salary, remaining in it, in point of fact, until Mr. Van Cortland himself had resigned.

In several instances had John Jeliffe been employed professionally by the millionaire, who had always held him in very high regard.

He was not surprised, therefore, at having received that afternoon a summons from Mr. Van Cortland to attend him at his house at the hour of eight.

He found himself in the elegantly furnished library of the Van Cortland mansion, face to face with the proprietor, who, to all appearance, was in anything but an easy frame of mind.

"John Jeliffe, I want your help," said the millionaire, "in having first satisfied myself that the man who has been followed by the robbers of the old coin-dealer's gold is the same man who has been followed by the robbers of the old coin-dealer's gold."

another step I want to know more of Durand and his methods. Find out all you can about him and I'll pay you well."

It was after midnight when Detective Jeliffe left the house of Mr. Van Cortland.

As he walked slowly down Fifth avenue, now dark and deserted, his mind was filled with many strange thoughts.

"A blue heart," he muttered, "a blue heart. The young man calling himself Henry Mudge is not the only person of my acquaintance so provided. If I chose I could bring to Mr. Van Cortland a young man on whose breast is a blue heart which I stand ready to swear has been there since he was a child."

July 19, 1890. Detective Johnnie saw three men run across Fifth avenue and leap the wall of Central Park.

Two of them were rough-looking characters whom he had never seen before. The third, much to his surprise, was Charles W. Warren, the Chambers Street photographer, whom he had known for years.

The two awkward-looking men carried large, heavy bags on their backs, and by their peculiar actions excited the suspicions of the detective at once.

Hurrying for aid, he also jumped the wall, and searched everywhere for the men among the trees of the park, but without success.

The next morning, when Detective Jeliffe opened the newspaper, he was not a little surprised to read the account of a burglary which had taken place the night before at a certain house on Fifth avenue opposite the park.

"After!" he exclaimed, giving vent to a prolonged whistle. "As true as I live, the house is directly opposite to the point where I saw brother Watson and his friends jump over the wall into Central Park!"

CHAPTER XVI.

CALEB CRUTCHETT.

These were trying days for Mr. Van Cortland; yet, as he knew only too well the moral suffering which he was now undergoing was not half what he deserved.

To be sure he might have written, requesting an interview, but feeling certain that Jeliffe would hasten to him as soon as he had anything to report, this was something the much-troubled millionaire hesitated to do.

The next day Mr. Van Cortlandt was recognized as black and he was inclined to paint himself, nor as he had been painted by others, although his crime had been black enough.

[illegible]

It was then that the man yielded to the tempter.

Since the world believed him dead, he would die to the world.

Placing the child in the care of one Caleb Crutchett, whom he had known in Boston in his youth, Alfred Minford changed his name to Alfred Van Cortland, came to New York and began his speculations there.

He was successful from the very start. Wealth poured in upon him, fortune favored him as he had never dared to hope.

At last he began to think of the boy to whose money he owed all this success.

The thought came too late.

Caleb Crutchett had disappeared and the boy with him.

Perhaps Mr. Van Cortland did not search as vigilantly as he might have done; at all events, he never found either the man or the child.

Now, in his old age, he was more than anxious to make amends; but had the real Henry Minford been found?

As has been already stated, Mr. Van Cortland greatly doubted this, and the reader knows how justly.

The more he saw of Joe Doubleday the more confident he became that the young man was an adventurer and a fraud and that he himself was the victim of a deep-laid plot.

Although he had been again visited by Durand & Co., and threatened with immediate exposure unless he paid over the million of dollars and signed a will according to the compact agreed upon between them, Mr. Van Cortland still hesitated.

He was willing to make full restitution to his brother's son, but he must first be sure that that son actually existed in the person of the young man calling himself Henry Mudge.

He was still hesitating, when one afternoon, as late as five o'clock, he started to walk—entirely in opposition to his usual custom—from the office of a lawyer with whom he had had certain business upon Broadway.

His brain was distracted, and he wanted to think. He was thinking of the maze into which he had been drawn, when he suddenly became aware that a short, thick-set man with one eye, who hurried past him, had turned and darted one piercing look at his face.

The glance was instantaneous, and it was no sooner taken than the man shot across Broadway and disappeared down a side street with all possible speed.

He had evidently recognized in Mr. Van Cortland a person whom he sought to avoid; while the mere sight of the face of the one-eyed man had caused the millionaire to turn as pale as death.

"Caleb Crutchett!"

The words burst from his lips involuntarily.

They were uttered heedless of the crowd who stared at him as he stood there.

He had seen the man who had assisted him in his early crime!

It was Caleb Crutchett, with whom he had left his infant nephew—Caleb Crutchett, whom both Durand & Co. and his pretended nephew had assured him had died in England some time before.

Entirely regardless of his surroundings, Mr. Van Cortland sprang after the one-eyed man, and hurried across Broadway.

Entering Worth street, down which the man had turned, he perceived him walking rapidly along that broad thoroughfare in the direction of Chatham Square.

It was evident that he entertained no idea of being followed, for he moved on without looking behind him, as moves a man with some particular destination in view.

The feelings of the millionaire had now become of the most exciting kind.

He had known Crutchett in his boyhood, known him far too well ever to forget him.

If he had been deceived into thinking him dead, was it not altogether probable that everything told him by Durand & Co. was equally false?

"I'm getting desperate," he muttered. "Let them do their worst, and I can be no more wretched than I am at present. Come what may, I'm bound to know the truth."

He resolved to follow the man ahead of him to his destination, and confront him face to face.

That destination proved—and not very greatly to Mr. Van Cortland's surprise—to be the office of Durand & Co., on the Oak street side of the house of the three doors.

Without having once looked behind him, the one-eyed man entered and the door was shut.

With every step the agitation of the millionaire had increased.

Bent upon knowing the truth, he had now worked himself up to that pitch where he was utterly regardless of consequences.

Without hesitation he ran up the steps of Durand & Co.'s office and disappeared through the door.

It was six o'clock.

At seven he had not reappeared.

Durand & Co.'s clerk had left for home half an hour before, locking the door of the office behind him.

Eight o'clock, and still no appearance of Mr. Van Cortland.

Nine—ten—eleven.

The street has grown dark and utterly deserted.

Twelve o'clock has come.

It is midnight.

Six hours ago Mr. Van Cortland passed through the door of Durand & Co.'s office, following the one-eyed man whom he believed to be Caleb Crutchett.

The one-eyed man passed out at a little after seven.

Mr. Van Cortland has not yet appeared.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

"COME, fill 'em up once more! The treat's on me this time. There you go! That's the talk. We'll make a night of it—By George, no, we won't either—I'm busted—haven't got a cent!"

The scene was in a fashionable drinking-saloon in the neighborhood of Union Square; the actors no less persons than Detective Jeliffe and Mr. Henry Mudge—late Joe Doubleday, the street fakir, who stood drinking together before the bar.

Now, although he had failed to report to Mr. Van Cortland, Detective Jeliffe had by no means been idle.

In addition to his watch on the house of the three doors, closely maintained at certain hours of the day, he had found time to cultivate Joe Doubleday, who, in his new character of a millionaire's nephew, had been cutting a wide swath about town.

Although Joe met with somewhat cold treatment, both from Mr. Van Cortland and his daughter, he enjoyed one portion of his new life immensely.

That was frequenting fashionable clubs, horse races and other places of resort, making new acquaintances and talking loud and large, as became the nephew of a millionaire.

Under these circumstances it had not been difficult for Detective Jeliffe to form his acquaintance.

Passing himself off as a rich idler from a western city, he had picked up Joe at Jerome Park, as the saying goes, and during several days had been engaged in the somewhat unsatisfactory undertaking of "pumping the young man dry."

The pumping process had been unsatisfactory for the reason that it had been unsuccessful.

Joe was willing enough to talk about horses, pretty girls, speculations, about anything and everything, in point of fact, except about himself.

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He went in, but did not come out.

Eight o'clock—nine—ten—eleven

Midnight came at last and still

2000

HARRY ASHMORE RECEIVES A LETTER—DISAPPEARANCE OF NO. 3.

"TELL you about my lost son" said Peter Stanton, the old

It was Harry Ashmore that the old man thus answered.

They were sitting in their room in the Varick street tene-

Half-past six was the hour, and the time the evening of the

The trouble was rheumatism or to be more explicit rheu-

It was an old complaint of his, always worse after any ED-

The lapse of several days though serving in some measure

At this involuntary compliment Peter Stanton fretted and

Nothing had been heard from Detective Jeliffe. No steps

To the best of his ability Harry strove to keep up the old

In his mumblings against fate—and he was always mum-

"I don't like to think of it," he continued, shaking his head.

"But how did you lose him?"

reply. My funds, which were in his hands, seemed also to have disappeared, for drafts made by me were returned dishonored.

"As soon as I could arrange matters I hurried back to Boston to investigate, there finding, to my surprise and horror, that my brother, proving unworthy of the trust which I had reposed in him, had possessed himself of all my property, taken my little boy and departed, no one knew where."

"What was your son's name?" asked Harry, seeing that the excitement of the old man was increasing every instant, and desiring to change the subject.

"His name," replied Peter Stanton, "was——"

"Rat! tat! tat! Rat; tat! tat!"

A sharp knock on the door cut short his reply.

Rising in answer to the summons, Harry threw open the door.

A plainly dressed man stood without.

"Is this Mr. Stanton's place?" he asked.

"It is."

"I want to see a young man named Harry Ashmore, who lives with Mr. Stanton. I have got a note for him."

"I am Harry Ashmore. You may give the note to me."

The man took a sealed envelope from his pocket, placed it in Harry's hands and immediately started off down-stairs.

"Won't you wait for an answer?"

"Nothing was said to me about any answer," replied the man, and in a moment more he had passed out of sight.

Returning to the room, Harry Ashmore hastily tore open the envelope.

The letter proved to be written on one side of a business sheet bearing the printed heading: "Hammel & Co. Reliable Servants Furnished. 99 1-2 Chambers street, New York."

It read as follows:

"If Harry Ashmore will call at the office of Hammel & Co., at the above address, this evening at half-past seven o'clock, he will receive information which the writer believes may lead to the discovery of a part, at least, of the old coin stolen from Mr. Stanton on the night of the —th inst. HAMMEL & Co."

"P. S.—Be prompt, and come alone."

"Well!" exclaimed Harry, "if this isn't the most mysterious thing. What do you think of it, Mr. Stanton? Read the letter for yourself."

"It is strange," repeated the old man, after glancing over the letter, "but still I think you had better go. Hammel & Co. are a well-known and reliable firm, so there can be no danger; though why they should have addressed you instead of myself is what I cannot understand."

"Perhaps they knew you were sick, and that I was attending to the business?"

"It is possible, certainly, but I can't see how they found it out. You are not afraid of any trap?"

"Trap! Oh, dear, no!" laughed Harry. "What in the world would any one want to entrap me for? I've got nothing to lose. I'll just go right around there and see what it is all about."

And he did so.

At half-past seven o'clock precisely Harry Ashmore entered the office of Hammel & Co., at the house of the three doors.

Evidently the communication which he was to receive is a lengthy one.

Eight—nine—ten o'clock have come and gone, and still the young man had not reappeared.

Eleven o'clock—yes, and twelve followed, and still no sign.

As the house of the three doors had swallowed up Mr. Van Cortland and Joe Doubleday, so with Harry Ashmore.

It is midnight now.

The old house stands dark and apparently deserted.

Five hours and a half have then elapsed since Harry Ashmore got.

CHAPTER XIX.

DENNIS O'DAY IN THE TOLLS.

AND where was Detective Jeliffe all this time?

If he had undertaken to watch the house of the three doors and seek to penetrate into its secrets, surely now at the time of these three mysterious disappearances he ought to have been on hand.

We left the detective shadowing Joe Doubleday, and that proceeding, if maintained without interruption, ought to have brought him to the house of the three doors.

As a matter of fact, that is just what it did, and it was in front of the mysterious house on the triangle that the interruption occurred.

Detective Jeliffe had not suffered his vigilant eye to be removed from Joe Doubleday during his ride down-town, his drinkings in Chatham street, nor until the moment when, by far too much overcome to know what he was about, the assumed nephew of Mr. Van Cortland tumbled into Christopher Watson's money-changing shop and disappeared.

No sooner had Joe entered than the detective gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"Ah, ha! my friend, so this is where you hail from, is it? Christopher Watson is then your backer? When the nephew of Mr. Van Cortland comes to associate with burglars, surely there must be something wrong."

From the emphasis which the detective, in his muttered exclamation, laid upon the word burglar, it would seem that he had not been idle since the night upon which he saw the money-changer, with his pals and their well-stuffed bags, leap the wall of Central Park.

Every means had been exhausted to draw Christopher Watson into the meshes of the law on the charge of being concerned in the burglary on Fifth avenue, but so far all had failed.

"Mr. Watson is out of town," was the invariable reply of Jenkins, his clerk, to all who inquired for him at the house of the three doors.

The suspicions excited by Detective Jeliffe, at seeing Joe Doubleday enter this place, were of the gravest kind.

Of course he did not guess that it was all a mistake—that Joe did not know the money-changer at all, but had believed in his muddled condition of brain that he was entering the office of Hammel & Co.

As John Jeliffe halted for a moment on the opposite side of the street, wondering how he had best proceed, he was startled by hearing a sound behind him as of a man falling down a flight of steps.

Turning suddenly, he perceived that this was exactly what had occurred.

At the bottom of a short flight of steps leading down into a cellar close to where he stood he perceived a man on his hands and knees endeavoring to regain the perpendicular, which, as he was in the last stages of inebriation, he seemed to find an exceedingly difficult thing to do.

It was Dennis O'Day.

Detective Jeliffe recognized him at a glance, having known the man by sight for years.

He was dressed in a fashionable suit, now well plastered with mud, while a tall hat of the latest style lay all crushed and battered where it had fallen, at the foot of the steps.

Now, in his persistent search for the gold stolen from the old coin-dealer's rooms in Mulberry street, Detective Jeliffe had not forgotten Dennis O'Day.

He had undertaken to visit every junk-shop in the city, but Dennis, having closed up the cellar and moved away, he had searched for him in vain.

Was there any significance in the fact that the man who had been seen falling down the steps of the house of the three doors was the same as the man who had been seen falling down the steps of the house of the three doors?

which had been discovered the Egyptian gold coin, had taken it into his head to disappear just at the time of the robbery?

Many times John Jeliffe had thought so. Now was the opportunity to prove whether or no his surmise was correct.

Drawing back out of sight, he remained with his eyes fixed upon the junk-dealer.

His movements were peculiar and erratic, to say the least.

With the utmost difficulty he managed to stagger to his feet, and for a time stood there swaying back and forth before the cellar door, like a sailboat at anchor in a gale.

He seemed to be striving to take something from the pocket of his pantaloons.

Making a desperate dive into that receptacle, he first brought up a jack-knife, gazed at it unsteadily, thrust it back, and then with another dive brought it up again.

This time he flung the knife angrily down, and, making another attempt at the pocket, succeeded in producing a silver dollar, a button-hook, a foot-rule, and at last a key.

This appeared to be the object desired.

A long and desperate attempt to fit the key to the lock of the cellar door followed, which being accomplished at last, the door flew suddenly inward, Dennis O'Day following it and falling all in a heap upon the floor.

It was while the fellow was trying to pick himself up that Detective Jeliffe slipped in.

The cellar was totally dark, and Dennis muttered as he went tumbling about.

Between the darkness and the noise the detective had but little difficulty in gaining the concealment he sought.

Although the sign was down, and Dennis himself had vanished from the neighborhood, it did not appear that any of the stock had been removed.

From behind a great pile of bags John Jeliffe found no trouble in watching all that took place.

Having recovered his balance at last, the inebriated junk-dealer proceeded, with many tackings to the right and left, to shut the door—he did not attempt to lock it—and light a lantern, which threw a feeble glimmer about the cellar, revealing a hopeless confusion of rags, old iron, articles of broken furniture and the like.

That the man had come here for a definite purpose there could be no doubt.

He staggered toward a great tierce in one corner of the cellar, and began throwing out the pieces of scrap iron with which it appeared to be filled.

"Begobs," he muttered, "I'm capitalist, I am. Greatest thing ev' saw. Got an' 'mount of money. Run fer alderman by this time nixt year. Bes' thing ev' did 'nall my life. Get square with old Watson now—with Crutchett, too, blast his blinkin' eye. I'll show 'em—I'll show 'em. Ah, ye beauties, here you are. Whin the locker is impty it's Denny O'Day what knows how to work the hidden mine."

He had leaned over the tierce now, and thrust his hands downward on the inside.

So far forward had he leaned, in fact, that the worthy Mr. O'Day was unable to straighten himself up, and when Detective Jeliffe sprang forward to help him, he found his arms thrust up the elbows in a mass of golden coins.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT BECAME OF MR. VAN CORTLAND.

When Mr. Van Cortland, following the man he believed to be Caleb Crutchett, entered the office of Durand & Co. in the house of the three doors, a person on whom all his thoughts had been centered was not to be seen.

Mr. Clark, Durand's confidential clerk, sat behind the desk, looking as unconcerned as possible.

He bowed politely to Mr. Van Cortland as he entered, and asked him what he wished.

"I want the man who just came into this office. I demand to see him."

The clerk smiled blandly.

"Really you must be mistaken, Mr. Van Cortland," he said. "No one has been in for half an hour beside yourself."

"But I know better. I saw him enter with my own eyes."

"Do you see him now?"

"Of course not."

"Then I don't think you will. There is no one in this office but ourselves, as you ought to be able to perceive."

"Say to Mr. Durand that I want to see him!" cried the banker, in a fury of rage. "You are not telling me the truth, young man. I——"

"Ding!"

A single stroke, as from a small call-bell, suddenly sounded in the office.

Without a word the clerk turned his back upon Mr. Van Cortland, entered the private office of Durand & Co., and disappeared.

For a few minutes Mr. Van Cortland paced the floor nervously.

Then, as the clerk did not return, he strode toward the door of the private office and grasped the knob.

It was fast.

Had Mr. Van Cortland lost all self-control?

It would seem so, for with rage blazing from his eyes he threw himself with all his strength against the door of Durand & Co.'s private room.

The door yielded.

Notwithstanding his age, the millionaire was no weakling. The screws which held the guard of the lock were forced from the wood.

But a surprise awaited him.

He had fully expected to find at least Caleb Crutchett and the clerk in the room, if not Durand himself.

Instead, he found no one.

The private office was vacant, although he had distinctly seen Mr. Clark pass through the door.

At that instant the sound of voices fell upon his ear.

They seemed to come from underneath the floor.

With the quickness of thought, Mr. Van Cortland opened the door of a clothes closet in one corner of the room and concealed himself inside.

It was well that he did so.

He had barely time to close the door and, stooping, press his eye to the keyhole, when he perceived that in the middle of the floor without a trap-door was being slowly raised, and the figure of the clerk came into view.

As his eyes rested upon the open office door he uttered an exclamation of astonishment, closed the trap, and ran to the office outside.

Presently he returned, and glanced hastily about the room.

"Old Moneybags has gone," he muttered. "He broke in the door thinking he would make something by it. He made nothing and he is gone."

Then he stooped, raised the trap-door, and again the solitary stroke of a bell was heard.

Having done this, Mr. Clark seemed to feel that he had done his duty, for he returned to the outer office again.

Mr. Van Cortland, trembling with excitement, continued to watch.

Presently through the open trap-door there appeared Mr. Durand, accompanied by the one-eyed man whom he had followed from Broadway.

Closing the trap-door carefully, the head of the private detective agency stepped into the outer office, and could be heard talking with the clerk.

The subject of their conversation Mr. Van Cortland could only surmise.

Probably it related to himself.

"I'm glad he's gone," he heard Durand say, as he returned to the inner office. "I'll attend to his case, never fear. You may as well shut up and go home yourself, Mr. Clark. We have some private business to transact here."

The clerk obeyed.

Meanwhile Mr. Durand, closing the broken door as well as he could, fell into conversation with the one-eyed man, little imagining that every word uttered was being heard by the very person against whom his plottings were turned.

"You are sure he recognized you?" was the first remark he made to his companion.

"Certain, Cap," replied the one-eyed man. "I seen that the very fust thing."

"And he followed you here?"

"That's the size of it. If it hadn't happened that Mr. Clark had tipped me with the wink that I was wanted below, he'd have caught me for sure."

"And what if he had caught you?" Durand replied, impatiently. "You can swear that you ain't Caleb Crutchett, I suppose; you can swear you were never in St. Louis, that you never lost the boy he placed in your charge—you can swear to all that?"

"Yes, but I don't want to," was the dogged reply. "I'm a hard man, and have been a bad one, but I loved that little feller as though he had been my own son. When they nipped me for till-tapping and sent me up to Jeffersonville State prison, out there in Missouri, I used to have died with worry about the little chap, but I never know'd what became of him after I left him with my neighbor, Jack Reynolds. I wouldn't be afraid to face Alfred Minford now if I did."

And the one-eyed man was observed by the watcher to rub his sleeve across his sole remaining optic in a manner decidedly pathetic in a self-acknowledged thief, to say the least.

To Mr. Van Cortland, who, of course, had overheard every word, the man's speech was a tremendous revelation.

Caleb Crutchett he certainly was, and Caleb Crutchett was very much alive, in spite of the fiction concerning his death in England, told by Joe Doubleday and Mr. Durand.

There was no longer any doubt about it.

What Detective Jelffe, with all his watching, had been unable to find out, Mr. Van Cortland had found out for himself.

In his eyes Joe Doubleday already stood a demonstrated fraud.

The conversation between Mr. Durand and Caleb Crutchett meanwhile proceeded.

To the astonishment of the banker, it was turned from himself to the discussion of the robbery of a certain Fifth avenue mansion not far from his own.

From what passed between them there seemed no doubt that the affair had been planned by Durand and executed by Crutchett. The plan had been arranged upon information furnished by servants of the household, the family themselves being out of town.

This pleasing subject disposed of, the millionaire, who was beginning to wonder how he was to get out, was startled by overhearing from Durand this remark:

"By the way, it's almost time for that other matter. Don't forget that the young man of whom I spoke to you is to be disposed of to-night."

"I don't forget," replied Crutchett, coolly. "Your pay is good, boss, and that is what I like. I'm ready any time."

"Very good. Go round to Hammel & Co.'s office; stand on the opposite side of the street. When you see the window-

shade in the last window on the second story raised you come upstairs."

"O. K., boss. I won't make no mistake."

Inside of two minutes the private office of Durand & Co. stood deserted.

Caleb Crutchett had been let out into the street by Durand, who locked the door behind him.

Then, opening the trap, the chief of the private detective bureau disappeared himself through the office floor.

No sooner had the trap closed over him than the hand of Mr. Van Cortland was upon the knob of the closet door.

The door refused to open.

According to his usual custom, the clerk had touched a spring which noiselessly secured the latch before departing for the night.

Stronger than its fellow in the office without, the closet door refused to yield to all the strength Mr. Van Cortland could exert.

It was thus that the millionaire came to be detained within the house of the three doors.

When midnight arrived he was still a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXI.

HARRY ASHMORE CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

"My name is Ashmore. I was told to call here in answer to this letter."

Our hero had entered the intelligence office of Hammel & Co., in the house of the three doors, promptly on time, and laying down the letter he had received, thus addressed the man behind the desk.

He was a stout, elderly gentleman, wearing green spectacles. By those who were familiar with the office he would have been at once recognized as Mr. Hammel himself.

There was no one else in the office at the time. The business of the day was over, and the clerks had gone home long before.

Mr. Hammel glanced at the youth through the green spectacles, then picking up the letter, he tore it into little bits and threw it in the waste-basket.

"So you are Henry Ashmore?" he asked at length.

"That's my name."

"You live with old Peter Stanton, the coin-dealer?"

"Yes."

"And I suppose you would like to recover the gold coins stolen from his room some time ago?"

"I certainly should. Your letter promised me as much, if you are Mr. Hammel, as I take you to be."

"I am Mr. Hammel, and I can put you in the way of recovering those coins, but before doing so I want to ask a few questions concerning yourself."

"Concerning myself!" exclaimed Harry, wondering. "What possible interest can my affairs be to you?"

"More than you think, perhaps. Have you lived long in New York?"

"Not very long. Less than a year."

"Where did you come from?"

"From Chicago."

"Parents live out there?"

"I know nothing about my parents, sir."

"How is that?"

"I can't tell you. I was brought up by a man named Reynolds. If he knew who my parents were he would ne-

ver tell me."

"And this Reynolds lived in Chicago?"

"The latter part of his life. Before that he lived in St. Louis."

threw open a door, revealing a flight of steps leading down to the regions below.

"Yes. When you reach the bottom, the well is just off to the right."

"But how be I going to see?"

"I've left a lantern down there for that purpose."

"Ain't you comin' down?"

"Not at all. I have no wish to be a witness to what you are about to do. I don't propose to hire a horse and drag the cart myself."

"Well, all right then, here's a go," muttered Crutchett, picking up the pinioned youth and throwing him over his shoulder as though he had been a sack of meal. "It won't take me long to fix him. I'll be back in a moment or two."

The man who held the lantern turned away to avoid the appealing gaze of Harry Ashmore as Caleb Crutchett bore him down the cellar stairs.

The moments passed.

At the head of the stairs the man stood waiting, his ear bent to catch every sound.

To his excited mind it seemed as though he could hear the low murmur of voices issuing from the depths below.

What was his accomplice about?

Not talking with his victim, surely?

"Hello, down there! What are you waiting for?" he called, leaning forward.

Receiving no answer, he was about to descend when Crutchett suddenly bounded up the stairs and clutched him by the throat.

"You miserable scoundrel!" he shouted, "you knew it—you knew it. The blue heart is on his breast, and you knew it! You would have had me kill the boy!"

Crack! Crack!

The man had wasted no time in speech.

Shaking off the grasp of the one-eyed burglar by a mighty effort, he drew his revolver and fired twice.

The echo of the shots rang out through the secret passage.

When the smoke cleared he found himself alone.

Caleb Crutchett had toppled backward down the cellar stairs.

Closing the door quickly and pressing a secret spring which securely bolted it, the man thrust the revolver in his pocket and leaned against the partition, breathing heavily.

"That settles you, my friend," he muttered. "Let's see you do anything now, alive or dead. You can't get out, your cries can never be heard. As for the boy, if he still lives——"

"Murder! Help! help! Murder! They are crawling all over me! Take 'em off! take 'em off! Ah—h—h—h!"

A wild, startling cry.

A series of frantic, horrible yells.

They came not from the cellar, but right ahead of him in the darkness, mingled with sounds of breaking and crashing, as though some one were trying to force his way through the partition beyond.

With a face as white as chalk the man seized the lantern and bent eagerly forward.

"Here he is—here he is! Catch him! Take him off! This way! this way! Help! help! help!"

This second cry was followed by a perfect pandemonium of sound.

The man, hastily extinguishing the lantern, hurried along the passage toward the office of Hammel & Co.

"It may be the detectives, it may be a mob," he muttered. "They are in Watson's office, whoever they are. Let them do their worst—when they come they'll find me gone."

He slipped through the door at the end of the passage, and closing it, shot the bolts on the inside.

Two minutes later a singular circumstance occurred on the Chambers street side of the house of the three doors.

It was the fact that Mr. Durand, the private detective, who

was never known to have entered the intelligence office, now slipped out of Hammel & Co.'s door, and without stopping to look behind him hurried away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BROTHERS—JOE DOUBLEDAY IN A BAD FLIGHT.

WHILE these events were transpiring on the inside of the house of the three doors, other and important events were taking place without.

Detective Jeliffe had not been idle.

In less time than it takes to tell it, after making his remarkable discovery in the cellar of Dennis O'Day, the detective had collared that individual and marched him off to the —th precinct station, and related to the sergeant how he had found him with arms buried to the elbows in a tierce of golden coin.

At first the sergeant in charge of the station found it difficult to believe it.

"Jeliffe, you must be dreaming!" he exclaimed. "I have known O'Day for years—I don't believe he has twenty dollars to his name."

And to this innocent remark was attributable the disclosure that followed.

Dennis O'Day was a born boaster.

Had he been sober he would have known better; but with him drunkenness and boastfulness went hand in hand.

Immediately he turned upon the sergeant and gave him the lie.

"Sure an' I kin buy'n sell yez," he roared, thickly. "I've gold enough to fill tin bails instid of wan. Sure an' I could buy the hull city of New York if I chose, and board uv aldermen to boot. Ef yez don't belave me, luk at that now—and that."

And the stupid boaster pulled a great handful of gold pieces from his coat-pocket and planked them down on the sergeant's desk.

They were ancient coins for the most part, although a fair sprinkling of twenty dollar gold pieces appeared among the rest.

"Jeliffe, I beg your pardon," whispered the sergeant. "Take Smith and Rooney and go back to the cellar; get a cart and bring that gold up here. Meanwhile I'll send a messenger for old Peter Stanton and will attend to pumping Dennis myself. I'll get out of him everything he knows—never fear."

The plan was put into execution at once.

So successful did the pumping process of the sergeant prove that before Dennis O'Day fell asleep in his cell, as he did soon after, he had exacted from him a full confession of all that occurred on the memorable night when going out of Donatello's shop to weigh a bag of rags he had come back with a bag of gold.

The way it happened was simple enough.

Dennis had seen the ladder leading up to the old coin-dealer's windows which had been left by the burglars.

Curiosity sent him up the ladder, and the natural thieving propensity of the man had caused him to help himself to a portion of the gold coins still remaining in the chests. Peter Stanton not yet having returned to consciousness upon the floor.

And as Dennis told of how he had picked up Harry Ashmore's dead body in the street, and ramblod about about the coming to life again and dying of his brother, and how he had story with a good deal about Christopher Watson, the old gold-charger, and Caleb Crutchett the burglar, the sergeant of the —th precinct station began to realize that he had there, in Detective Jeliffe, secured a prize.

By the time that Detective Jeliffe came on a morning of

gold, drawn upon a hand cart, the messenger sent out by the sergeant to secure the attendance of old Peter Stanton had returned to say that that individual could not be found.

"Where did you go?" asked the detective.

"Why, to Mulberry street, of course."

"Seeing that he hasn't been living there in two months, it's no wonder you didn't find him," exclaimed John Jelfie. "I'll go for him myself."

It was after midnight when the matter was settled.

Peter Stanton at first declared that he could never leave his rooms, but the news that a portion at least of his precious hoard had been discovered and was now at the station-house, caused him to change his mind.

Of course he identified the coins at once.

Then, after promising to see that Detective Jelfie was liberally rewarded, he made the startling announcement that Harry Ashmore had received a summons from Hammel & Co. regarding the coins, had gone to their place early in the evening and had not yet returned.

Having heard the old man's story, both the sergeant and Detective Jelfie were inclined to regard it as a very serious affair.

"We'll go around to the house of the three doors at once," said the latter. "I have suspected something crooked in that place for a long time, and think it more than likely that Watson is at the bottom of it all."

It was the blue heart that had aroused the suspicions of Detective Jelfie.

Now that he knew that it was in front of Watson's shop that the attempt had been made on Harry Ashmore's life, he found himself wondering whether there was not collusion between the burglarious money-changer and his old employer, Durand.

It was, perhaps, a quarter past twelve when, accompanied by Peter Stanton and Officer Rooney, he arrived at the house of the three doors.

As they approached it on New Chambers street, they were surprised to find quite a crowd collected about the money-changer's door.

"There's a crazy man in there, mister!" they cried, as the officers approached. "Hark! Don't you hear him yell?"

They would have been deaf if they had not, for from the shop of the money-changer the most horrible screams could be heard proceeding.

Running up the steps, followed by the old coin-dealer, John Jelfie burst in the door, while the officer drove back the crowd.

They entered just in time to see a wild, distraught looking figure disappear through a trap-door in the floor of the money-changer's shop.

It was Joe Doubleday.

Although his clothes were torn almost off of him, the detective recognized him as the supposed Mr. Nudge at a glance.

The furniture of the room was broken and scattered about in all directions.

It looked as though some terrible conflict had been in progress, while at the bottom of a flight of steps which could be seen opening from the trap-door the most unearthly yells could now be heard.

"It's the delirium tremens," muttered the detective. "The fellow has kept this drinking business up a day too long, and has brought them on himself at last."

He was down the steps and after him with a bound.

The old coin-dealer, filled with amazement, followed more slowly.

At the bottom of the steps they found themselves in a dark passage, at the end of which could be seen a faint glimmer of light.

As they advanced the yelling and shouting increased. When at length, after traversing the passage and mounting a second flight of steps, the detective was astounded at finding himself

in the back room of his old quarters, the office of Durand & Co.

There in the midst of a pile of furniture tumbled about in every direction was Joe Doubleday, dancing and shouting with maniacal glee.

He had lighted the gas, and was pointing toward a closet, from which faint cries for help could be heard to proceed.

"There he is! There he is!" shouted the infuriated man. "The devil is in that closet—I've cornered him. I broke through the floor—I found his secret hiding-place—I've got him safe at last."

A moment later and a strange scene was being enacted in Durand & Co.'s back room.

Joe Doubleday lay stretched on the floor, shouting and yelling, held down by Detective Jelfie's ample form.

Facing each other in the middle of the room stood the old coin-dealer and Mr. Van Cortland.

The face of the banker was pale, and his form trembled; his eyes were suffused with tears.

"Brother!" he cried, extending his hands toward old Peter Stanton, who stood gazing at him wildly—"brother, thank God that I find you still alive. Speak to me—speak and tell me that, though I have so deeply wronged you, you can yet forgive a penitent man after all these years."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE THREE DOORS EXPLAINED AT LAST—THE END.

It was at an early hour next morning that Mr. Hammel, of Hammel & Co., appeared at the intelligence office in New Chambers street, no later, in fact, than six o'clock.

Of course he had no right to expect his clerk to be on hand at any such time as this, nor did he appear to; for, opening the door with his latch key, he stepped upstairs and entering the private office, began hurriedly thrusting into his pockets certain papers which he took from the compartments of his safe.

He had not been thus engaged more than five minutes when he was surprised at hearing his own name pronounced from the outer room.

What could it mean?

He had not left the door open; how then could it be possible that any one had entered the place?

"Mr. Hammel, good-morning," exclaimed the well-known voice of Detective Jelfie, presenting himself at the door of the private office. "I called to inquire if you could give me any information as to Mr. Watson's whereabouts—he is wanted by the police."

The keeper of the intelligence office trembled. His eyes flashed fire which the green spectacles effectually concealed.

"I have no acquaintance with Mr. Watson," he said slowly. "May I ask you by what means you found entrance to my office at this early hour? Be good enough to retire. We are not open for business yet."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the detective, politely. "I took the liberty of opening your door with a key I happened to have," and he immediately left the office, closing the door behind him as he went.

Mr. Hammel, raising the window, peered nervously out into the street.

Detective Jelfie stood on the opposite side watching the house.

"They are crowding me close," he muttered. "Oh! if I could only deal with John Jelfie as I dealt with Crutchett. But I'll fool them yet. I'll take all the gold I can carry, and before they can get on my track be out of New York. Watson at least must never return."

What does he mean?

Does Hammel & Co. control the movements of Christopher Watson? We shall see.

Dropping the window-shade, Mr. Hammel retired to the private office and closed the door.

A moment later, had any one looked into the private office of Hammel & Co., they would have found it vacant.

Did Detective Jeliffe surmise this?

It would seem that he did, for, deserting his post shortly after, he ran around the corner into Oak street just in time to encounter Mr. Durand, with a face as white as chalk, in the act of emerging from the house of the three doors on the Oak street side.

No sooner did that individual perceive the detective than, slamming the door in his face, he retreated inside the office of Durand & Co. again, fastening it on the inside.

Here he stood viewing the scene of destruction wrought by Joe Doubleday the night before with staring eyes.

"I was a fool to come here!" he hissed. "The detectives have ransacked everything during the night. Have they found the body of Crutchett? Is the boy alive or dead? I dare not stop to think, much less to look. There is but one chance left, and I must take it without delay, not stopping even for the gold."

Thus speaking, he hastily descended the steps below the trap-door which stood wide open, and hurried along the passage leading to Christopher Watson's money-changing shop.

Now it was Durand who entered the secret passage, but it was Christopher Watson himself who crept up the steps at the other end.

Here the trap was closed, and he pressed the spring with trembling hand.

The trap-door flew open.

Before the man had time either to advance or retreat he felt himself grasped by the hair and dragged upward into the room.

"Up with your hands, Christopher Watson!" exclaimed the stern voice of Detective Jeliffe. "As Hammel, as Durand, or by your own proper name, with which I now address you, the house of the three doors shall know you no longer, for the law knows you for what you are, and will deal with you according to your deserts."

And as he saw behind the detective Mr. Van Cortland, Peter Stanton, the coin-dealer, and Harry Ashmore, not to mention two stout policemen, the man of triple life made no effort at resistance, but quietly threw up his hands.

"That settles it," exclaimed John Jeliffe, joyfully, as he slipped on the handcuffs. "Gentlemen, there stands the king of conspirators, blackmailers, burglars and frauds."

"Call him Hammel, Durand or Watson, it is all the same. The mystery of the house of the three doors is a mystery no more!"

And so it proved to be.

In vain did the man of mystery try to avoid conviction, but Sing Sing prison to-day holds him hard and fast.

As gathering up the loose ends of a narrative is but dull business at the best, we propose to make our ending exceedingly brief.

It was during the night, while they searched every part of the house of the three doors thoroughly, that Detective Jeliffe and his companions found Harry Ashmore in the cellar, with his bonds loosened, but held a close prisoner in the damp, foul-smelling place.

They found there other things also.

One was the hoard of gold coins stolen from the old dealer, the other Caleb Crutchett—dead.

Removing the coins to the —th precinct station, whither Joe Doubleday, in a frightful condition, had previously been carried, a comparison of notes was held, during which it was made plain beyond all question that Mr. Van Cortland and old

Peter Stanton were the brothers, Alfred and Henry Minford, and that Harry Ashmore was none other than the old coin-dealer's long-lost son.

It was the blue neart tattooed on Harry's breast that settled all doubts at last.

To tell of the trial of Christopher Watson—for such was his true name—and that of Dennis O'Day is needless.

Suffice to say that the whole plot against the banker was fully proven, as was the fact that Watson and his accomplices had stolen the coin-dealer's hoard.

How he ever learned the story of Harry Ashmore was a mystery.

Probably Crutchett could have thrown some light upon the matter had he lived.

Nor could Joe Doubleday help them any.

Although identified by several persons as the former street fakir, Joe was able to communicate nothing, as he died of the delirium tremens that night.

How little—how very little he had gained through lending himself to a rascally fraud!

And how stand matters to-day with the actors in this tale?

Thoroughly repentant, Mr. Alfred Van Cortland—he still maintains the name—has made full restitution, not to his brother, but by the request of that brother to Harry Minford, his son.

The reconciliation is complete, and our hero, having received his father's golden hoard also, which amounted to a full half million, now forms one of the inmates of their happy home.

Rumor says he is soon to marry his fair cousin, Helen Van Cortland—who, by the way, proved to have been the occupant of the carriage which so nearly cost the old coin-dealer his life—but as to this we cannot positively say.

Dennis O'Day languishes in prison, and is forced to work side by side in the foundry with his old enemy, Christopher Watson, who is undergoing sentence for life, as his killing of Crutchett other than in self-defense could not be positively proved.

Doubtless Dennis wishes from the bottom of his heart that he had been content to take his bag of satinets from Donatello's shop on that memorable night, and to have left the gold alone—but then all evil-doers are apt to repent of their crimes when it is too late.

Against Clark, Jenkins and Bates, clerks in the offices of "Hammel & Co.," "Durand & Co.," and Christopher Watson, nothing definite could be found.

Doubtless they were all parties to the fraudulent acts of their employer, but as there was no proof they were allowed to go free.

Fortunately for our hero, he at least has no cause to regret that fate was kind enough to throw him in the old coin-dealer's way.

He has youth, wealth, and hosts of friends.

He has found a loving father, an uncle who, deep in repentance, anticipates his every wish, not to allude to what in the future may prove to be even more tender ties.

Under these circumstances it is exceedingly unlikely that the boy whom we have, in this simple tale, known as Harry Ashmore, will ever forget THE HOUSE OF THE THREE DOORS.

[THE END.]

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